

JOHN WESLEY



By S. REED BRETT

ILLUSTRATED BY WENDY BRYER-ASH

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LIVES TO REMEMBER



JOHN WESLEY PREACHING AT NEWCASTLE
Chapter V

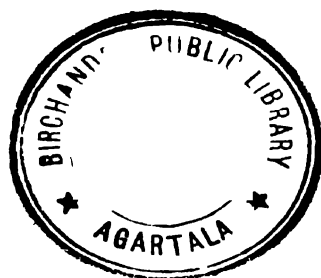
LIVES TO REMEMBER

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JOHN WESLEY

CHAPTER I

A REMARKABLE FAMILY

THE rectory at Epworth in Lincolnshire, where John Wesley and his brothers and sisters were born, was very like other rectories and farmhouses scattered over the English country-side. It was a rambling old place, much of it built of wood and plaster, and its roof was thatched. Like other such houses, though it could be snug in winter and had stood up to the worst that the winds and rains of the fenlands could do, it was more than once in danger of destruction by other means. Not very long before John was born, the thatch caught alight and the home was barely saved: and this was only a foretaste of worse that was to come.

But, though the house was not unusual, the rector and his wife together could hardly have been matched in England. Samuel Wesley, the rector, came of a good family, another branch of it being the Wellesleys of Ireland, from whom later the great Duke of Wellington was to spring. Even more important as an influence on Samuel Wesley was the fact that both his father and grandfather had been clergymen and scholars. Samuel was a hard-working little man, devoted to learning and to his work in his parish. Probably none of his learning had any permanent value, not even his vast commentary in Latin on the Book of Job, on which he lavished years of labour and

dedicated to Queen Caroline, wife of George II. But his scholarly example infected his children: the three boys, Samuel, John, and Charles, were all scholars, and the girls were educated far above the average of young women in the eighteenth century.

Samuel Wesley's good qualities had two drawbacks. First, his sense of duty made him unpopular among his parishioners whose faults he did not hesitate to point out. Epworth stood in a district of north-west Lincolnshire called the Isle of Axholme. Bounded by three rivers, it was an isolated area and the farm-labourers who lived there, and formed the majority of his flock, were ignorant and rough, with little understanding of their pastor's religion and little sympathy with his difficulties. Some of them were his bitter enemies, and when the rectory caught fire there was more than a suspicion that this had not been an accident.

Second, Mr. Wesley, for all his learning and devotion, had little practical sense. Attached to the rectory was farmland which he tried to cultivate. But he knew little about farming and had little business ability. His income was pitifully small, and the constant losses of crops—from mismanagement, bad seasons, and the enmity of neighbours—kept the family desperately poor. Often he was heavily in debt, and this added to the family's difficulties. Altogether, it is impossible to understand how even the bare necessities of food, clothes and fuel were found for the large Wesley family.

The family never could have been provided for had it not been for the endless self-sacrifice of the rector's wife, Susanna. She, too, came from a long line of distinguished people. Her father, Dr. Samuel Annesley, a first cousin of the Earl of Anglesey, was a Puritan minister who had won

some fame during the Commonwealth. Large families were common in the eighteenth century. Susanna was Dr. Annesley's twenty-fifth (and youngest) child and she and Samuel Wesley had nineteen children, of whom John was the fifteenth and Charles the eighteenth. So little was then known about the laws of health, about diet, and even about the need for a pure water-supply, that in every family it was usual for several children to die either soon after they were born or before they grew up. This happened to ten of the nineteen children of the Wesleys. Even so, there were always several children at a time to care for. When we remember that Mrs. Wesley had long spells of ill health, sometimes being unable to leave her room for weeks or even months at a time, we can only marvel that she managed to care for them at all.

Nor was she content to care for their bodies only, but took upon herself to educate their minds as well. For twenty years she regularly spent six hours every day in teaching her children. Her methods might seem rigid and hard to us, but they produced great results. What her children thought about it all when they were young, we do not know, but there was not one of them who later did not look back thankfully to the training he or she had received. Mixed age-groups in one class held no problems for Mrs. Wesley: no two children were ever the same age in her class. As each child in turn passed the fifth birthday, the others had to look after themselves for a day while Mrs. Wesley spent the whole six hours of one school-day in teaching the one child his or her letters. So thorough was this grounding that she never needed to repeat it. The next day the child began to spell out the shorter words in the first chapter of the Bible. Susanna declared that at the end of three months her children were able to read better



‘than most of women can do as long as they live’. So the youngest gradually joined the others in their lessons.

In addition to these daily lessons with all the children together, she spent some time each evening with one child at a time, talking especially about religion. Once, when her husband was staying in London, she wrote to him saying: ‘On Monday I talk with Molly, on Tuesday with Hetty, Wednesday with Nancy, Thursday with Jacky, Friday with Patty, Saturday with Charles; and with Emily and Sukey together on Sunday.’

This was written when John—or ‘Jacky’ as the family called him when he was a small boy—was about seven years old. He had been born on 28th June 1703, and to his upbringing his mother gave special care. This was due not to favouritism but to her conviction that some great

destiny lay ahead for him. Perhaps the explanation of this belief was the tragic event of the night of 9th February 1709.

Towards midnight the rectory thatch again caught fire. The inmates' first warning of it was when fire fell on the bed of one of the children, Hetty. She ran to call her father. The other children were hastily roused and hurried or carried, wearing only their night-clothes, to the stairs. Already the whole house was ablaze, and escape was possible only at the risk of lighted clothes and scorched bodies. Samuel Wesley gathered his family into the garden only to realize that Jacky was missing. Rushing back to the house, he tried to fight his way upward through the flames, but by this time the whole building was a roaring furnace which no-one could enter or leave alive. At that moment, Jacky's head appeared at an upper window. Perhaps his experience is best told as he himself related it years afterwards:

I remember all the circumstances as clearly as though it were but yesterday. Seeing the room was very light, I called to the maid to take me up. But no-one answering, I put my head out of the curtains and saw streaks of fire on the top of the room. I got up and ran to the door, but could get no further, all beyond it being in a blaze. I then climbed on the chest which stood near the window; one in the yard saw me, and proposed running to fetch a ladder. Another answered, 'There will not be time; . . . here, I will fix myself against the wall, lift a light man and set him upon my shoulders.' They did so, and he took me out of the window. Just then the whole roof fell in. . . . When they brought me into the house where my father was he cried out: 'Come, neighbours,

let us kneel down; let us give thanks to God! He has given me all my eight children; let the house go. I am rich enough.'

Who was the man whose quick-wittedness saved the otherwise doomed child will never be known; but if he had failed, the story of the English people ever since, and the English character, would certainly have been different.

The rectory had indeed gone and everything with it. But it was like Samuel Wesley and Susanna to remember chiefly what had been saved, Jacky most miraculously of all. It was the narrowness of his escape that convinced his mother that only God's special care had saved him and that there must be some great purpose in His doing so. She used to write down some of her thoughts each evening, and one evening she wrote:

I do intend to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child that Thou hast so mercifully provided for, than ever I have been, that I may endeavour to instil into his mind the principles of true religion and piety.

It was some time before Susanna could carry out her resolve. Her family had to be scattered among friends and neighbours while a new rectory was being built. It was a more substantial house than the old one. The lath and plaster walls were replaced by red brick, and there was room even for Samuel Wesley's large family. Nevertheless the fire added considerably to their difficulties. Mrs. Wesley found that the children, while away from her care, had fallen into slack ways that she would never have allowed, and so she had to be even more earnest than before in training them. Also, of course, the loss of their possessions made them poorer than ever.

Strangest of all was the fact that the new rectory developed a ghost. He (if it was a 'he') was most active at the close of 1716 and during 1717. Susanna was certain that the strange sounds were a sign of danger, perhaps of death, to some member of her family, and she wrote to her sons Samuel and Charles, at Westminster School, to enquire if they were well. Knockings were heard in various parts of the house. Sometimes there were sounds like several people tramping up and down a room or on the stairs. Once Mr. Wesley, as he was entering his study, felt something press against him, though nothing was to be seen. Most often the knockings were heard during family prayers, especially when the rector said the prayers for His Majesty, King George I. It seemed as though the ghost objected to King George's being prayed for, and so the children called it a Jacobite ghost! Sukey, the second daughter, writing to her brother Samuel, reported that the noise began when 'my father says "Our most gracious Sovereign Lord", etc. This my father is angry at, and designs to say *three* instead of *two* for the Royal Family.' After a time the Wesleys became so used to the ghostly noises that they ceased to be scared and treated it all as a joke. They even gave to their visitor the nickname of 'Old Jeffrey'. After several months the noises grew less frequent and then ceased altogether. Perhaps ghosts do not like being taken for granted or joked about. There seems to be no doubt at all about the fact of the manifestations, and the family did its utmost to find natural explanations of them, but all in vain. Except perhaps for a very short time, Old Jeffrey did not alter the ordinary life of the rector's household.

By the time that the ghost had come and gone, Samuel Wesley's flock was becoming scattered. The eldest son,

Samuel, had been away from home for several years. Born in 1691, he was twelve years older than John and nearly seventeen years older than Charles. He had been a pupil at Westminster School and had then gone to Oxford, after which he went back as an usher (or under-master) at Westminster. In 1716 he sent for Charles and paid for him to be a pupil there also. Two years earlier than this, in January 1714, John entered Charterhouse. This had been possible by the interest of his father's patron, the Duke of Buckingham.

Charterhouse was a notable school. Its name was due to its being on the site of an old priory of the Carthusian Order, that is, one whose rules were like those of the parent monastery at Chartreuse in south-eastern France. After the dissolution of the English monasteries by Henry VIII, the London Charterhouse property changed hands several times until it was bought by a certain Thomas Sutton. Sutton died in 1611, and by his will he provided for building and keeping up some almshouses and a school. During the century that had passed since its foundation, the school had made a great name for itself, and some of its Old Boys had achieved fame. Much of this success was due to the Head Master, Dr. Thomas Walker who, when John Wesley became a pupil, had already been Head for thirty-five years.

To leave the carefully ruled family circle in the isolated Isle of Axholme and to go straight to a school of strangers in the heart of London must have been something of a shock to eleven-year-old John. But his home training had not been in vain. His grounding in English and in Latin and Greek was sound. So was his own discipline. A boy who, like his brothers and sisters, had been taught, as his mother wrote, 'to cry quietly' when punished or in pain,

and to eat whatever was put before him, was not likely to be soft if he was bullied or to turn up his nose at plain fare.

Of John's life at Charterhouse, not much detail is known. That he was not unhappy is shown by the delight that he took in later years in returning to the school. And that while there he did not disgrace himself or his family was shown by his being provided with moneys from Charterhouse to take him to Oxford—£40 for each of three years, and £100 for a fourth year. So, on 24th June 1720, he was entered at Christ Church, Oxford.

CHAPTER II

THE SCHOLAR-CLERGYMAN

IT is not difficult to imagine the sort of dreams in the head of a seventeen-year-old youth as he travelled up to Oxford for the first time. His father, and his elder brother Samuel, had been there before him, and the name of Oxford was one to conjure with in the Wesley household. Now, as John took possession of his rooms at Christ Church, its spell was being laid upon him too. Before long, however, he began to realize that everything there was not as bright as he had imagined. Though Oxford was a city of learning, not everyone there was keen to learn. Many of the undergraduates had no idea of earning a degree but were there only to pass the time in gaiety, or worse, with their fellows. What shocked John more than the common idleness was to know that many of those who intended to become clergymen, and some of the university fellows who were already clergymen, led bad lives and openly scoffed at Christian beliefs.

Another, and constant, shadow over his life was the old shadow of poverty. While many of the other men had money to throw about, he was hard put to it to find the bare necessities of life—books, clothes, boots, and even food. His family could do almost nothing to help him. Poverty at Epworth was never worse than during the early 1720s. A little improvement came when, in 1722, the rector received also the nearby small living of Wroote, and to Wroote the family moved for a time. This added a

welcome £50 a year to their income, and presumably they were able also to let the rectory at Epworth. Even so, they were burdened with long-standing debts and could not at once do much for John at Oxford. In August 1724 he received a letter from his mother who wrote from Wroote:

Let me hear from you often, and inform me of the state of your health, and whether you have any reasonable hopes of being out of debt. I am most concerned for the good man who lent you ten pounds, and am ashamed to beg a month or two longer, since he has been so kind as to grant us so much time already. . . . But, if all things fail, I hope God will not forsake us. We have still His good providence to depend on, which has a thousand expedients to relieve us beyond our view. Dear Jack, be not discouraged; do your duty; keep close to your studies, and hope for better days. Perhaps, notwithstanding all, we shall pick up a few crumbs for you before the end of the year.

A few weeks later she wrote again:

The small-pox has been very mortal at Epworth most of this summer. Our family have all had it except me, and I hope God will preserve me from it. I heartily wish you were in orders and could come and serve as one of your father's curates. Then I should see you often, and could be more helpful to you than it is possible to be at this distance.

It seems likely that Susanna's desire that John should take holy orders—that is, should be ordained as a clergyman—strengthened, if it did not start, thoughts of his own in the same direction. Letters soon afterwards from both his

father and his mother show that he had written home for advice on the subject.

So it came about that in September 1725 John Wesley was 'ordained deacon by the Bishop of Oxford. He preached his first sermon in the village church of South Leigh near Witney in January 1726. Two months later came a real red-letter day for the young clergyman, and for his family: in March 1726 John was elected a Fellow of Lincoln College. This recognition of his talents and attainments was welcome in itself. Its practical importance was that, for the first time in his life, lack of money ceased to plague him. His father was jubilant, not because of the financial gain but because of the honour which all the family shared. Writing to John, Samuel addressed him gleefully as: 'Dear Mr. Fellow-Elect of Lincoln', and went on to say that though he had only £5 to keep his family until after harvest—and the harvest was then several months away—it now did not much matter: 'What will be my fate, God only knows. Wherever I am, my Jack is Fellow of Lincoln!' Susanna must have felt that here was her reward for being 'more particularly careful for the soul of this child'. She could not guess at the infinitely greater reward that still lay ahead.

In the spring of 1726, Samuel, now ageing, had a slight stroke of paralysis. John went to his help by being at home for the summer, preaching each Sunday either at Epworth or at Wroote. So, for the time, Susanna had her heart's desire. In September John returned to Oxford where very soon he was winning high opinions for his work. He was appointed to be a lecturer in Greek and a Moderator of the Classes so that he had to preside over the daily debates at Lincoln College. These were responsible positions for one who was only twenty-three years of age.



In February 1727, he took his Master of Arts degree.

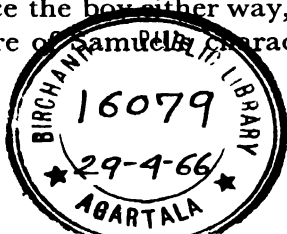
In spite of these opportunities and calls he again yielded to pressure for help at home, and in August 1727 left Oxford for the dreary waste of the Isle of Axholme. There for two years he acted as curate to his father. But all that time he was realizing that he was not achieving anything. The peasants at Wroote, where he mostly preached, were quite unmoved by his sermons. In his heart he knew that the fault was not theirs but his. Though he was diligent in his work and his studies, though his preaching was sound and scholarly, he knew that these things were not enough. He had no message that answered to the needs of ordinary men and women. The more time and thought he gave to his studies and devotions, the more aware he became that his words were barren. It was a bitter experience for an earnest young man. At one point he seriously considered

giving up his career as a parish priest and becoming a schoolmaster.

To some extent the problem was solved when the Rector of Lincoln College called upon him to take up his work again as Fellow. It was a call he was glad to answer. It must have been with a deep sigh of relief that, in November 1729, he turned his back on his failure at Wroote and entered his beloved Oxford once more. But, familiar though its sights and sounds were to him, there was one new factor for which he was not prepared.

In 1726, Charles had followed his brother John's example and had become an undergraduate at Christ Church. Charles had always been a light-hearted boy and youth, the life of any group of youngsters. The children at Epworth had had a family habit of writing in rhyme, sometimes gay and sometimes grave, according to the circumstances. Much of what they wrote was mere doggerel, but it at least provided them with an amusing diversion. Of them all, Charles excelled as a rhymster. But, underneath, Charles had a serious vein.

This seriousness was shown by an incident shortly before Charles left Westminster School. In Ireland there was a branch of the Wesley family represented by a Mr. Garrett Wesley at Dangan, about twenty miles from Dublin. He was the last of his line of the family and was anxious to adopt one of the Epworth boys as his heir. Having visited the family, he offered to adopt Charles who thus had the chance to inherit an Irish estate and fortune. One can imagine the success that his merry smile and quips would have had in Ireland. Charles asked his father's advice about the offer, but Samuel refused to try to influence the boy either way, which shows a commendable feature of Samuel's character, when we remember



his extreme poverty. In the end, Charles declined the offer. His reason for so doing has never been known, though the most likely reason seems to be that family ties in England meant more to him than a landed estate in Ireland. Whatever the explanation, his refusal shows that there was more in Charles than a desire for a care-free life such as the Irish fortune could have gained him. Incidentally, the man whom Mr. Garrett Wesley did adopt as his heir was later created Lord Mornington and his descendants included the Marquis of Wellesley, Governor-General of India, and the Marquis's younger brother the great Duke of Wellington, the victor of the Battle of Waterloo.

Though Charles went to Oxford in his usual gay mood, the mood soon passed, and when John returned there in November 1729 the surprise awaiting him was a strangely serious young brother. Again there is no knowing what brought about the change, but it was a real and lasting change. Charles had taken his degree as Bachelor of Arts and had gathered around himself a small group of young men who had agreed together to do two things that very few were accustomed to do in Oxford: they would take their studies seriously, and they would keep their college rules, especially those about regular attendance at services in the college chapel. Already they had become marked men in Oxford, and their more frivolous fellows called them the 'Holy Club'.

It was just like Charles that, as soon as John appeared on the scene, he should regard John as the recognized leader of the 'Club'. John, though very much approving of what was being done, was not satisfied until rules had been drawn up for the members. They were to give a part of each day to private devotions; they were to meet

regularly for prayer and to read the New Testament in Greek; on three or four evenings each week they were to study Greek and Latin authors together; and on Sundays they were to discuss some religious book. This was all part of a scheme for the methodical portioning out of their time. It is not surprising that they were therefore soon being scoffed at as 'Methodists'.

They were not by any means concerned only for themselves, however. Most of them either were already ordained clergymen or were expecting to become so, and they began to care for some of the many unfortunate people living in poverty and misery round about. Nowhere was a greater mass of misery to be found than in the prisons, particularly in the debtors' prisons where men and women were shut up for years for a debt which there was no hope of their ever being able to pay off because while in prison they could not earn the money to do so. Thus they existed in degrading conditions and in a spirit of increasing hopelessness. If a man (or woman) was clean and honourable when he went in, he would need to be extremely strong-willed if before long he was not dragged down to the depraved level of his fellow-prisoners.

It happened that a member of the 'Holy Club' went to one of the Oxford prisons to visit a man condemned to death for murdering his wife. What the visitor saw there appalled him. His account of it moved the rest of the Club so deeply that they began to pay regular visits to the nearby prisons. Scraping together what small funds they could, they took in some food, and even paid the debts of a few of the prisoners in order to set them free. A few of the prisoners were taught to read so that they could read to the others. Often it was unpleasant work, but the Club felt that it was the sort of work that Christians ought to be

doing. Also, they gathered together some poor children and began a school for them. These too had to be fed and clothed before they were in a fit state to learn.

In the year 1735 the Holy Club gained a new member who was to become only a little less famous than the Wesleys themselves. He was George Whitefield, the son of the keeper of the Bell Inn at Gloucester. Though a poor boy, he had managed to enter Pembroke College as a servitor, that is, he received instruction in return for waiting upon other members of the college. From the time that he threw in his lot with the Wesleys at Oxford, his life and theirs remained linked together in many ways for many years, as the rest of our story will show, and he became the most moving preacher of his day in England.

One other event that very much affected the Wesleys in 1735 was the death of their father Samuel. The end for him was peaceful and merciful, but for the rest of the family it brought the end also of their home. After the furniture was disposed of, Mrs. Wesley lived with one or another of her children until John made a home for her with him in London.

Before that happened, John and Charles were to have some exciting, if disappointing, adventures on the other side of the Atlantic.

CHAPTER III

AMERICAN ADVENTURES

By a strange coincidence it was the evil conditions of English prisons, mentioned in the previous chapter, which was the indirect cause of the Wesleys' travels to the other side of the Atlantic.

The overflowing prisons of the eighteenth century were, of course, not an accident. They were a result of widespread and grinding poverty. It was a period of long wars broken by occasional intervals of peace. Of the eighty-seven years of John Wesley's long life, nearly a half were war-years for England. This, as usual, caused high prices and high taxes, and interruption to trade, all of which made the poor to be poorer still. During the same period, the introduction of power-driven machinery for many processes of manufacturing, which we usually speak of as the Industrial Revolution, threw large numbers of people out of work and compelled many others to work long hours for miserably small wages. There was then no proper public relief for poor people; so thousands of families starved, and thousands more were always hungry.

It is not surprising that many men and women, in such circumstances, were driven to lives of crime. Thefts from houses and shops, violent highway robberies, and poaching, were common both in town and country. To deal with such crimes there was no proper police-force, and the government tried to prevent them by harsh laws, enforcing severe punishments for many actions which we in

the twentieth century should consider to be petty offences. When the members of the Holy Club began to visit the Oxford jails, there were 160 different offences for which the punishment was death, and before the end of the century the number was increased to 253. These included picking a pocket of more than one shilling, and stealing goods valued at five shillings or more. It is easy to guess how trifling were the offences which earned the lighter penalties of imprisonment or transportation to the plantations in North America or the West Indies. Executions, carried out in batches, were a public spectacle. John Wesley noted in his *Journal* on Sunday 26th January 1785:

I preached the condemned criminals' sermon in Newgate. Forty-seven were under sentence of death. While they were coming in, there was something very awful in the clink of their chains.

It was perhaps not surprising that many people tried to drown their sorrows in strong drink. Beer had long been the national drink in England, enormous quantities of it being consumed by all classes of people. What was much worse, during the early part of the eighteenth century, was that gin-drinking became common. Very large quantities of corn were used in distilling gin, so the landowners were strongly in favour of gin-drinking; and as Parliament was made up mainly of landowners and their friends, the law did nothing to limit it. So widespread was the habit that in many parts of London one house in every six was a gin-shop with this advertisement; 'Drunk for a penny; dead drunk for twopence; clean straw to lie on free.' The moral results became so terrible that in 1751 even a landowning Parliament had to pass an Act which put a heavy tax on spirits and regulated their manufacture and

sale. This long orgy of gin-drinking increased poverty and crime and, of course, produced many other evils such as the wrecking of home life and the neglect of helpless children.

Small wonder that not only the Oxford jails but jails all over the country were overflowing with debtors. Some of these were there through their own folly. But many were the innocent victims of eighteenth-century conditions. When anyone was thrown into prison for even a small debt, he was quite unable to free himself, and he stood a good chance of remaining where he was for the rest of his life, in appalling conditions, unless some friend discharged the debt for him. Also, because he was unable to earn, his wife and children were soon likely to join him and share his endless imprisonment.

The members of the Holy Club were not the first people to be anxious for prison-reform. Chief among the interested people was James Oglethorpe who as a young man had served under the Duke of Marlborough and was later to reach the rank of General. In 1722 Oglethorpe became a member of Parliament and so continued for more than thirty years. In 1729 he persuaded Parliament to appoint a committee to enquire into the conditions of the jails. The facts which the committee discovered shocked the country. Some of the jailers were prosecuted for their ill-treatment of the prisoners, and gradually public opinion demanded reforms.

But such reforms were slow in coming. In the meantime Oglethorpe was deeply concerned for the poor wretches still in prison. He and some of his friends raised money to release some of the prisoners by paying their debts. But this was touching only the fringe of the problem. The next question was what was to happen to the

debtors after their release. Many of them had nowhere to go and no means of making a fresh start in life. Oglethorpe's solution was to send them overseas to a colony in the new world of America.

During 1730, Oglethorpe was able to form a society for the settlement of prisoners. Their first plan was to take a hundred debtors and to secure a charter which would grant them lands to the south-west of South Carolina in North America. The Prince of Wales was the first subscriber to the funds. In April 1732 King George II signed the charter for the new colony which was to be called Georgia. The first party of settlers, made up of thirty-five carefully chosen families, headed by Oglethorpe himself, sailed from Gravesend in a little two-hundred-ton vessel in November 1732.

The young colony met with the usual discouraging difficulties but, owing largely to Oglethorpe's leadership, it survived. Further settlers were taken out from time to time, and so the population grew. One of Oglethorpe's wishes was to find suitable clergymen to care for the religious needs of the colonists. In August 1735, a mutual friend introduced the Wesley brothers to him. This was not the first time that Oglethorpe had heard of their family. He had subscribed twenty-one guineas towards the production of Samuel Wesley's volume on *Job* of which he received seven copies. Before long the two brothers and two other Oxford men agreed to go out to Georgia: Charles was to be Oglethorpe's secretary, and John was to be responsible especially for missionary work among the Indians. They set sail in a small vessel called the *Simmonds* on 21st October 1735.

The voyage was eventful in unexpected ways. The four friends made for themselves a time-table which was as

‘Methodistical’ as if they had been at Oxford: from their rising-time at 4 a.m. until their bed-time at 10 p.m., every moment of every day was planned and fully occupied. Part of the day was spent in private devotions and study, and part in work among the passengers. John Wesley set aside three hours each morning for learning German so as to be able to talk with a party of German refugees who were among the settlers for Georgia. They were followers of John Hus who, in the early fifteenth century, had broken from the Roman Catholic Church and suffered martyrdom. But his ideas spread, though his followers were liable to severe persecution. Early in the eighteenth century, just at the time that John Wesley was at Oxford, there was a particularly fierce attack on those who lived in Moravia which was a province near to where John Hus himself had lived three hundred years before and now is part of Czechoslovakia. Many Moravians fled and scattered. Some of them came to England, and Oglethorpe included twenty-six of them among the emigrants on the *Simmonds*.

These Moravians made a deep impression upon everyone on board, not least upon John Wesley. They were quiet, well-conducted people, and were quite unmoved by the trials and dangers of the voyage. It was John Wesley’s habit to keep a *Journal*—now published in eight large volumes—in which he wrote down the events of his daily life and some of his thoughts about them. During his voyage to Georgia this habit was kept up in spite of the lack of quiet and privacy. His accounts of the storms that several times broke over the vessel are vividly graphic. What impressed him almost more than the storms was the calmness of the Moravians. On Sunday 25th January 1736 he wrote:



In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began, the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, 'Was you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no.' I asked, 'But were not your women and children afraid?' He replied mildly, 'No; our women and children are not afraid to die.'

The effect which their assurance had upon Wesley remained long after the voyage had ended and was going to have a deep influence on his whole life.

It was on Friday 6th February that the voyagers first set foot on American soil. Wesley notes: 'Mr. Oglethorpe led us to a rising ground, where we all kneeled down to give thanks.' The next day Wesley had a conversation with a Moravian pastor named Spangenberg who asked him:

'Do you know Jesus Christ?' I paused, and said, 'I know he is the Saviour of the world.' 'True', replied he; 'but do you know he has saved you?' I answered, 'I hope he has died to save me.' He only added, 'Do you know yourself?' I said, 'I do.' But I fear they were vain words.

Wesley was still aware, as he had been while his father's curate at Epworth, of lacking a something in spite of his knowledge and devotion. Though he did not then realize it, this conversation started in him a new train of thought which would end by changing his whole outlook. It can be regarded as a turning-point in his life.

A few days later a small group of Indians came on board the *Simmonds* which was still anchored off-shore. They included a Chief, Tomo Chachi, with his wife Sinauky, who, through an interpreter, said: 'I am glad you are come. I will go up and speak to the wise men of our nation; and I hope they will hear. But we would not be made Christians as the Spaniards make Christians: we would be taught before we are baptized.'

Though John Wesley had first intended to be a missionary to the Indians, he found that he was kept busy in other ways. While Oglethorpe and Charles took most of the new colonists to another settlement at Frederica, John had to remain in Savannah where the first Georgia settlement had been made. Unfortunately he lacked the experience necessary to deal with the motley collection of people whom he found. Some were religious-minded people like the Moravians, others were thriftless people recently freed from debtors' prisons, and others again were traders who lived by sharp practices of all kinds. Among such a small but mixed company of men and women, where petty jealousies were rife, only a shrewd judge of character could hope to work successfully. John had then no such judgement. Then, and to some extent all his life, he failed especially in his judgement of women. He expected that they would be like the women at Epworth, his sisters and, most of all, his mother Susanna; but not all of them were. Both during the voyage and after landing, certain of the women seemed to be devout but were really more anxious to draw attention to themselves. Partly out of kindness of heart and partly because he did not understand, John at first treated them as genuine. He regarded them as he thought a clergyman ought to regard his parishioners, listening to their confidences and giving

advice. The results were sometimes regrettable, with misunderstandings on both sides.

None of this prevented him from carrying out his regular clerical duties, though he had few opportunities of the missionary work among the Indians which he had hoped to do. Georgia lay immediately to the north of the Spanish colony of Florida, and invasion by Spaniards was always possible. General Oglethorpe spent a large proportion of his time at the settlement at Frederica which was near the Spanish border, usually taking Charles Wesley with him. At such times, John's zeal in watching over Savannah caused complaints among the colonists there. They objected to the frequent services and religious meetings which they were expected to attend.

Charles met similar difficulties at Frederica. When John heard of this, he immediately set out to help his brother, though this involved a six-day journey by boat. His *Journal* records:

About four in the afternoon I set out for Frederica in a pettiawga—a sort of flat-bottomed barge. The next evening we anchored. . . . I wrapped myself up from head to foot, in a large cloak, to keep off the sand-flies, and lay down on the quarter-deck. Between one and two I waked under water being so fast asleep that I did not find where I was till my mouth was full of it. Having left my cloak, I know not how, upon the deck, I swam round to the other side of the pettiawga, where a boat was tied, and climbed up by the rope without any hurt, more than wetting my clothes.

This matter-of-fact coolness in danger, already shown at the rectory fire when he was only a child, continued with

him all through his life and, as our story will show, saw him safely through many dangerous situations.

At Frederica there were two women who thought themselves in love with General Oglethorpe and decided that they would have greater influence over him if they destroyed Charles' influence. So they told false stories to the General about his secretary, and to the secretary about the General, until each had deep suspicions about the other. The worry which this caused to Charles made him so ill that he was unable to carry out his duties. When he had partly recovered, he and Oglethorpe renewed their confidence in each other but, so far as Charles was concerned, the damage was done. He was thoroughly tired of his work as Oglethorpe's secretary and, more serious, he knew that he would never be a success in Georgia. At the end of July 1736, Oglethorpe sent Charles back to England with despatches to the Trustees. On the day before he sailed, Charles resigned his post as secretary. He had been in Georgia less than six months.

His brother John's chief trial was yet to come. This, too, centred round a lady though she was not willingly a mischief-maker. She was an eighteen-year-old girl named Sophie Hopkey, the niece of the store-keeper, Thomas Causton. She had half-promised to marry a man who turned out to have an undesirable character, and when she withdrew her promise, he made himself unpleasant. Perhaps it was natural that she should take her troubles to the local clergyman. John Wesley and she talked things over several times. Sophie was an attractive girl, and gradually John became aware of it, so much so that he grew uncertain whether or not he wanted to marry her. There seems no doubt that her uncle, Causton, and even Oglethorpe, favoured the match. During weeks that

dragged into months, John was tortured by doubts. At last he decided to end his agony by casting lots. On one slip of paper he wrote 'Marry'; on a second, 'Think not of it this year'; and on a third, 'Think of it no more'. He persuaded a friend to draw one of the lots, and he drew the third! At last the issue was settled for him, probably in the way that, in his quieter moments, he would have wished, for he realized that a wife would make it almost impossible for him to give undivided attention to the work to which he was called.

But he was soon to learn that this was not the end of the matter. The real shocks were yet to come. The next event was that John was being asked to publish the banns of marriage between Sophie and a Mr. William Williamson. This marriage was opposed by Causton who regarded Williamson as an unsuitable husband. But the pair did not mean to be thwarted. They ran off and were married elsewhere. After returning to Savannah, Sophie became irregular in attendance at church services and led a life that did not agree with her previous religious profession. At last John refused to allow her to take Holy Communion. Causton, regarding this as a public insult to his niece, took legal action against Wesley for defaming her character. To this charge, several others were added until a list of ten was compiled. The Grand Jury which had first to hear the case was obviously made up largely of Wesley's enemies, and the majority found him guilty. Even so, there was a strong minority in his favour, and his enemies dared not arrest him.

But however the business might end, it had ruined any chance that Wesley's work in Georgia could be successful. There was nothing for it but to withdraw from the colony. Because his enemies tried to prevent his doing so, he went

into the adjoining colony of South Carolina and reached its port, Charlestown. There he found a vessel, the *Samuel*, on which he set sail on Christmas Eve, 1737. Thus he had been in America a little less than two years.

Once again, as after his two-year curacy at Epworth and Wroote, he felt himself a failure. At the end of the voyage home he wrote in his *Journal*:

It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country; in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity: but what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why (what I least of all suspected) that I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God.

He landed at Deal on 1st February 1738. The events of the next few weeks would show that he was nearer to the solution of his problems about himself than he could then have thought possible.

CHAPTER IV

THE NEW JOHN WESLEY

To John Wesley himself, the most distressing part of his misadventures in Georgia was not that he had not reached the Indians, as he had hoped to do, or that he had got on the wrong side of the English colonists, but that he now knew that he had never truly had a message to take to them. He was compelled to confess to himself that all his earnest devotion had been on wrong lines. An early entry in his *Journal*, before he had embarked for Georgia, reads: 'Our end in leaving our native country was . . . singly this—to save our own souls.' This he had hoped to do by good works like those of the Holy Club at Oxford. The Moravians, however, had shown him that no man can save his soul by good works but only by trusting himself to God as a man may trust himself to the ocean to support his weight. When Wesley stepped ashore, he knew that he would never have any rest until he could see how to do this.

This did not mean that he intended to wait idly for something to happen. On the way from the coast to London he conducted prayers at the inns where he stayed. When he reached London he lodged with an old friend, Rev. John Hutton, whose son James kept a bookshop, near Drury Lane, called the 'Bible and Sun'. A few days later he noted in his *Journal* as 'A day much to be remembered' because he met by chance another group of Moravians, among them Peter Böhler who had come to Eng-

land on the first stage of his journey as a missionary to Georgia. The friendship which at once sprang up between Wesley and Böhler was the means of changing the whole trend of Wesley's life. Slowly he felt his way forward and soon came to the point where, realizing his own lack of true faith, he felt that it was useless to go on preaching as he had been doing.

I asked Böhler whether he thought I should leave off or not. He answered, 'By no means.' I asked, 'But what can I preach?' He said, 'Preach faith till you have it, and then, because you have it, you will preach faith.' Accordingly I began preaching this new doctrine.

Such preaching was little understood even by the clergy of the time, although it was the same as Martin Luther had preached two centuries earlier, and others long before that. Even to John Wesley it was 'this new doctrine'. Hence, over and over again, after he had preached he was told: 'Sir, you must preach here no more.'

Böhler's time in England was running short, and Wesley spent every available moment in his company, and so did his brother Charles who was passing through an experience not unlike John's. On 4th May Böhler left London for Georgia, but he had done his work.

It was, indeed, Charles who led the way. On Whit Sunday, 21st May 1738 John noted: 'I received the surprising news that my brother had found rest to his soul.' As might be expected, Charles expressed his overflowing feelings in verse: he wrote a great hymn opening with the line: 'Where shall my wondering soul begin?'

For John the climax came three days later. It can never be better told than John himself told it in the oft-quoted

entry in his *Journal* under the date, Wednesday 24th May 1738:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and of death.

His first impulse was to share his experience with Charles. Charles' own brief record is:

Towards ten, my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of our friends and declared, 'I believe!' We sang the hymn with great joy, and parted with prayer.

They sang *the* hymn—what other hymn than the one that Charles had written to express his own amazing experience?

John did not at once sail into smooth water. He was 'much buffeted by temptations'. But as the days passed it became clear that he was a changed man. He had a new way of looking at things and a new power in dealing with people.

Realizing that much of this new light had come to him through the Moravians, John decided to visit some of the settlements which Moravian refugees had been able to set up in Germany, especially one near Herrnhut near to Dresden and on the borders of Bohemia. So, in the middle of June, he set off, one of a party of eight of whom five were English and three Germans, travelling through Rotterdam and Amsterdam, and so on into Germany.

Though the journeys were full of interest, they were sometimes wearisome. The travellers were often held up by petty officials while passes were examined. He noted that at Dresden:

We were carried for above two hours from one magistrate or officer to another, with the usual impertinent solemnity, before we were suffered to go to our inn.

Even worse at Neustadt:

We could not procure any lodging in the city. After walking half an hour, we came to another little town and found a sort of inn there: but they told us plainly we should have no lodging with them; for they did not like our looks. About eight we were received at a little house in another village, where God gave us sweet rest.

Wesley visited various Moravian centres, spending a fortnight at Herrnhut, and was deeply impressed by much of what he saw. Some of the rules which afterwards he drew up for his own religious societies were based on what he had learned from the Moravians.

The germ of such societies was already to be found in a group of people who had a meeting-place in Fetter Lane. One of the members of this group was Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, with whom the Wesleys thus became acquainted and who later will come into our story again.

Before 1738 was out, another turning-point in Wesley's career was being approached. This was brought about by George Whitefield whom we last saw as a humble servitor at Oxford and a member of the Holy Club. He, too, had been attracted to Georgia: the vessel conveying him there had passed Wesley's returning vessel just before the latter reached Deal in February 1738. At the end of a year

Whitefield was back in England, but his experience in the meantime had been very different from the Wesleys'. Less formal than they, he was popular with the people of Georgia from the start and had founded an orphanage which showed every sign of success. It was in order to raise funds for this orphanage that he had returned to England.

Since his early Oxford days, Whitefield had developed into a highly forceful speaker. Though he was only twenty-five years of age, his preaching was not merely correct and learned. It was oratory which could compel attention and could sway an audience to go the way he wanted. He had a voice of such resonant quality that Benjamin Franklin, the great American leader and scientist, declared that it could be heard by 30,000 people at once. He used it with such dramatic power that an audience could forget itself so far as to imagine itself actually taking part in the scene that Whitefield was describing. There was, for example, the famous occasion when the irreligious Lord Chesterfield, passing by a throng to whom Whitefield was preaching, stopped on the outskirts to listen. Whitefield, to illustrate his sermon, was painting a word-picture of a blind man walking nearer and nearer to a sheer precipice. So entranced was Chesterfield, and so carried out of his own surroundings, that, as the blind man was about to put his foot over the edge, Chesterfield leapt up, crying 'By God! he's gone'.

Such methods and such enthusiasm were regarded by the general body of Church-of-England clergy as extremely bad form. The fact was that in the eighteenth century the Church was in a sadly low condition. It was no uncommon thing for a bishop not to live in the diocese of which he was the head and from which he drew his



income. Many parish clergy copied the bishops' example, and paid miserable salaries to curates to carry out their duties for them. In plenty of country parishes especially, the parson was much more interested in fox-hunting with the squire than in giving spiritual care to his parishioners. Church services were conducted according to form, but meant little either to most of the clergy who conducted them or to most of the people who attended. Small wonder that the mass of English people were completely outside the influence of the Church or of religion in any shape. The last thing that the average eighteenth-century clergyman wanted was any religious stirring among his people or any movement that would show up his failings and so compel him to take a more active part in the religious life of his parish.

This was the real reason for the churches' being closed to the Wesleys and, not less, to Whitefield. The tragedy

was that the real object of all three of them was to bring the people into the active life of the very Church whose pulpits were being closed to them. What the Wesleys might have done in reply, if left to themselves, there is no knowing. But Whitefield was made in a different mould. He lacked the strict upbringing of the Wesleys, and he was naturally less rigid than they were. In other words, he was more open to new ideas. So compelling was his inward urge to declare his message that, when church after church was denied to him, he looked for some other means of declaring it. Very soon he was preaching in the open air.

He began by preaching to a handful of colliers at Kingswood near Bristol. No-one had ever heard preaching outside a church, and certainly no-one had ever heard such preaching as Whitefield's. Within little more than a few days, the handful had grown to thousands. There and in other places in the neighbourhood of Bristol, he commonly preached to vast crowds reckoned to number anything between ten and twenty thousand. To appreciate this influence properly, we must remember that miners in the eighteenth century were ignorant and brutalized to an extent that in these days we can hardly imagine. It was no mean achievement to preach to such creatures so movingly, as they came from the coal-pits, that the tears 'made white channels down their blackened cheeks'.

His success soon raised a problem, as success often does. Whitefield believed that what was being done at Bristol could be done elsewhere. In any case, before long he must return to Georgia. But how could he leave the work at Bristol? No sooner was the question in his mind than he saw the answer. And the answer was John Wesley who, of all the men whom Whitefield knew, was best fitted to carry on the work. He therefore wrote to Wesley begging

him to come to his help. 'This', said Wesley, 'I was not at all forward to do.' While still in London he did not fully appreciate the vast opportunity that Whitefield was holding out to him. Perhaps even more he shrank from a method of preaching that was so different from the practice of the Church of England.

John Wesley consulted his brother Charles and the Fetter Lane society. Over and over again he opened his Bible and put his finger blindly on a verse (much as if he was casting lots) hoping that the answer to the problem would be provided. All seemed unanimously against the venture. But John's conscience had been roused. So, against the advice of his friends and against his own desires, he mounted his horse and made for Bristol. Once there, his mind was made up for him. Whitefield took him out to see for himself what was being done. John's own account of his feelings is clear. Under the date, Saturday 31st March 1739 he notes:

In the evening I reached Bristol, and met Mr. Whitefield there. I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church.

Two days later he took the decisive step:

At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city to about three thousand people.

It is not easy for us to realize all that this action meant for a clergyman in the eighteenth century. Wesley had been brought up in the belief that God could be truly worshipped only in the buildings and the set services of the English Church. Small wonder that he 'could scarce reconcile' himself to the 'strange way of preaching in the fields'. He knew, too, that many of his friends would not agree with it. Though his brother Charles followed him into the fields, Charles was never quite comfortable there and, though John and Charles always remained warm friends, the time came when they took different views about some of John's methods.

At Bristol John was indeed at the parting of the ways. Yet he had no doubt which was the direction appointed for him. He had at last emerged from the long, dark feeling of his own unfitness for his work. His experience in the room in Aldersgate Street, that had 'strangely warmed' his heart, had given him also a passion to pass on to others the truth that had come to him. He believed that Whitefield's call had provided the opportunity for so doing.

Where this new conviction would lead him, and what would be the end of it all, neither Wesley nor anyone else in 1739 could foretell. During the next fifty years he went on step by step as new opportunities opened to him, by the end of which time his work had changed the character of the English people.

CHAPTER V

HIS WORK BEGINS

WHEN John Wesley accepted the challenge to take over the work begun by Whitefield in the neighbourhood of Bristol, nothing was further from his mind than setting up any kind of religious society. Wherever he preached, men and women of all kinds went through a deep religious experience similar to that of the Wesleys themselves. John Wesley's only concern then was that these new converts should be brought under the influence of the Church, and in large numbers they began to attend nearby churches in order to take Holy Communion as Wesley had encouraged them to do. Many of the clergy, however, turned them away, giving as reasons either that they were from other parishes or that some of them had not been baptized. The real reason mostly was that such clergy did not wish for the extra work which large numbers of new communicants would cause, and did not approve of the enthusiasm which they showed.

To John Wesley it became at once clear that, if the Established Church would not shepherd his new converts, he must care for them himself. Many of them were ignorant people and knew almost nothing about religion. So he began to form them into groups or societies which could meet together for instruction and guidance. Two such societies were soon formed in Bristol. Also, on 9th May 1739, he bought a piece of land in the Horse Fair, Bristol, where a room could be built large enough to hold

the two societies and to spare. Only three days later, Wesley laid the foundation-stone of what was to become known as the New Room. Within three weeks he was preaching in the shell of the building which was to become the first Methodist meeting-house. Evidently he was not a man to let the grass grow under his feet.

The clergy were not the only people who did not approve of Wesley. One of the places in the Bristol district to which his influence had spread was Bath. Bath was a centre of fashion for all England. To drink the waters of Bath and to resort to the Pump Room, whether one was ill or not, had become the rage among noble and rich folk of all ages. Such people regarded Wesley's work among the poor and outcasts as highly improper. Nor did the traders, and others who made their livings out of the wealthy, wish the visitors' attention to be turned aside by religion. So they planned to make Wesley look ridiculous.

The Master of Ceremonies in Bath for many years had been Beau Nash. In reality he was, by 1739, a worthless and depraved old man, but by fine clothes and fine manners he had won, many years before, such attention as to be known as the King of Bath. While Wesley was preaching in Bath, Nash appeared, and the audience, 'among whom were many of the rich and great', waited to see what would happen. Nash asked by what authority Wesley preached. Wesley replied:

'By the authority of Jesus Christ, conveyed to me by the Archbishop of Canterbury.'

'This is contrary to Act of Parliament: this is a conventicle.'

'Sir', said Wesley, 'the conventicles mentioned in that Act are seditious meetings; but . . . here is no shadow of sedition; therefore it is not contrary to that Act.'

'Your preaching frightens people out of their wits.'

'Sir, did you ever hear me preach?'

'No.'

'How then can you judge of what you never heard?'

'Sir, by common report.'

'Give me leave, Sir, to ask. Is not your name Nash?'

'My name is Nash.'

'Sir, I dare not judge you by common report.'

We can almost hear the titters of the crowd. It was not for nothing that John Wesley had taken part in, and then presided over, the classics debates at Lincoln College.

A week after this encounter, an urgent letter came from London imploring Wesley to return in order to straighten out difficulties that had arisen in the society which met in Fetter Lane. Having preached in Bristol on the afternoon of 11th June, he records that on 13th June 'in the morning I came to London'—a journey of about 115 miles in less than two days on horseback was not bad going on eighteenth-century roads!

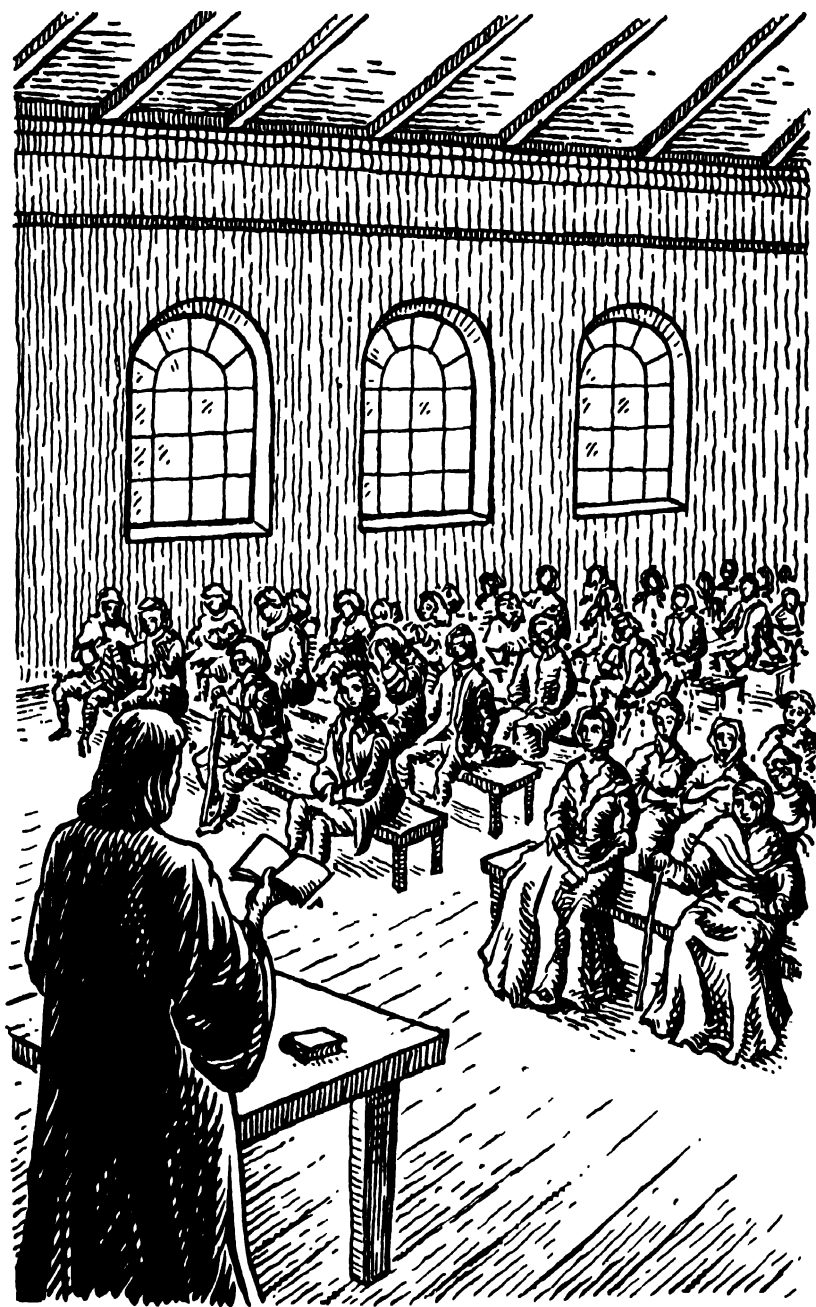
Wesley's presence restored order at Fetter Lane, but only for a time. The root of the trouble was one which neither he nor anyone else could cure. Most of the Fetter-Lane society were Moravians or their followers. Though Wesley was a great admirer of the Moravians, he disagreed sharply from them on certain important points of belief. Many of them followed a sort of passive religion very different from Wesley's activity in both deed and thought. In these circumstances, discord could not be avoided. Over and over again Wesley tried to find some way of agreement, but all in vain. At last he came to believe that complete separation was the wisest course. On Friday 18th July 1740 he noted: 'We consulted how to proceed with regard to our poor brethren of Fetter

Lane: we all saw the thing was now come to a crisis, and were therefore unanimously agreed what to do.' Two days later he went to a meeting there and, having explained his views, he ended: "I have borne with you long, hoping you would turn. . . . Nothing now remains but that I should give you up to God. You that are of the same judgement, follow me." I then, without saying any more, withdrew, as did eighteen or nineteen of the society.'

What was to happen to these eighteen or nineteen? Already a number of small societies of Wesley's followers were meeting together in various places. Soon more settled arrangements would have to be made for them, especially as Wesley's open-air preaching was influencing a steady stream of people. Both at Moorfields (near to the present Finsbury Square), which was a popular park, and on the outskirts of London on Kennington Common, he preached to multitudes no less than those in the west country.

During the second half of 1739, Wesley divided his time between Bristol and London. Though the weather was never allowed to interfere with his journeys, and though a crowd seemed always willing to stand to hear him no matter how intense the cold, the coming of winter made some sort of shelter desirable. What was needed was a building in London similar to the one already built in Bristol.

Close to Moorfields stood a disused and ruined government foundry. In 1716 some French cannon, captured by Marlborough, were being recast there when a terrific explosion occurred. The roof of the foundry was blown off, the walls were wrecked, and many people were killed. Such processes were too risky in a populated area, so the government set up a new foundry at Woolwich, leaving the old



foundry derelict. So it remained until towards the close of 1739 when John Wesley bought the site and the ruined building for £115. Plans for a building suitable for the Wesleys' purposes were soon being carried out. Nearly a further £700 were needed for the work. The Wesleys had no capital of their own, but gradually, mostly in small subscriptions, the money was raised.

What came to be known as the Foundry, consisted of a group of plain buildings which were the centre of Wesley's work in London. Its meeting-house could hold about 1,500 people seated upon rough benches (men on one side of the house and women on the other). There were also classrooms, a coach-house and stable, and rooms for John Wesley himself and for a few of his lay preachers. Later there were a book department and a medical dispensary. As soon as the rooms were ready, Wesley brought his mother, Susanna, and there she made her home until her death in July 1742 at the age of seventy-three.

Wesley was away from London so much that it was necessary for someone to be constantly in charge of the work at the Foundry. For this purpose he appointed a young man named Thomas Maxfield who had been influenced by the preaching at Bristol. His duties were to meet the Methodist classes, to read approved sermons on the Scriptures, and to have a general oversight of the work centred at the Foundry. Before long, Maxfield was delivering his own sermons, which he did very capably. But Maxfield was a layman, and even the Wesleys had not yet outgrown the idea that it was not fitting for anyone but an ordained clergyman to be a preacher.

News of Maxfield's preaching reached Wesley at Bristol. Thereupon he took horse and rode to London. As soon as he dismounted, his mother, seeing the determined look

on his face, asked what was amiss and received the pointed reply: 'Thomas Maxfield has turned preacher, I hear.' Susanna's words were equally clear: 'Take care what you do with respect to that young man; for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching, and hear him yourself.' So Maxfield had to preach with John Wesley in the congregation. Wesley at once acknowledged his own error, exclaiming: 'It is the Lord! let Him do what seemeth Him good. What am I that I should withstand God?'

Wesley recognized Maxfield as a lay preacher, and as time passed he appointed many others also. Indeed, without them his work would not have been possible. Only a handful of clergy gave him any help or looked after any in their parishes whom he had influenced for good. As he travelled through the length and breadth of the land, he left converts behind him. Many months might pass before he could return to the same neighbourhood. So he was obliged to rely upon laymen not only as leaders of the classes which he everywhere formed but also as preachers to strengthen his followers and to win others. Thus once more, unintentionally and step by step, Wesley is finding himself driven to methods that he would have scorned only a few months, or even weeks, earlier: first field-preaching, next separate meeting-houses, and then the recognition of lay preachers. Such has always been the experience of pioneers and reformers.

During 1742, Wesley opened up a third centre for his work. In May he set out on a tour of the north of England, taking with him his servant John Taylor. By the end of the month he was in Newcastle-on-Tyne, about which, he notes, 'so much drunkenness, cursing, and swearing (even from the mouths of little children) do I never remember

to have seen and heard before, in so small a compass of time'. At 7 o'clock on the last Sunday morning in May, in 'the poorest and most contemptible part of the town', the two Johns, Wesley and Taylor,

began to sing the hundredth Psalm. Three or four people came out to see what was the matter; who soon increased to four or five hundred. I suppose there might be twelve or fifteen hundred before I had done preaching. . . . Observing the people, when I had done, to stand gaping and staring at me, with the most profound astonishment, I told them, 'If you desire to know who I am, my name is John Wesley. At five in the evening, with God's help, I design to preach here again.' At five, the hill on which I designed to preach was covered, from the top to the bottom. I never saw so large a number of people together, either at Moorfields, or at Kennington Common. I knew it was not possible for the one half to hear, although my voice was loud and clear. . . . After preaching, the poor people were ready to tread me under foot, out of pure love and kindness. . . . I was vehemently importuned to stay with them, at least, a few days, or, however, one day more.

On his southward journey from Newcastle, Wesley travelled through Epworth, his birth place. He met with a mixed reception. On Sunday 6th June he wrote:

A little before the service began, I went to Mr. Romley, the Curate, and offered to assist him either by preaching or reading prayers. But he did not care to accept my assistance. . . . After sermon John Taylor stood in the church-yard, and gave notice, as the people were coming out, 'Mr. Wesley, not being permitted to preach in

the church, designs to preach here at six o'clock.' Accordingly at six o'clock I came, and found a congregation as I believe Epworth never saw before. I stood near the east end of the church, upon my father's tombstone.

Afterwards he spent several days in the neighbourhood. On one of the days he met a Justice of the Peace who told him that some angry villagers had hustled some of Wesley's converts before him but could not find any legal charge to bring against them, until an old man piped up:

'An't please your worship, they have *converted* my wife. Till she went among them, she had such a tongue! And now she is as quiet as a lamb.' 'Carry them back, carry them back,' replied the Justice, 'and let them convert all the scolds in the town.'

So the rest of the year passed, mainly in London and Bristol, and in journeys between the two. But in the middle of November, Wesley was back in Newcastle where Charles had recently spent several weeks. So widespread was the response in the neighbourhood that John decided to build a centre for the work as he had done at Bristol and London. A large piece of ground^d was secured on a suitable site, and on 20th December he laid the foundation stone.

Thus by the beginning of 1743, less than five years after John Wesley's own conversion, what were to be the main features of his work were already becoming clear—his open-air preaching, his organization of his followers into classes, his appointing laymen to preach, and his erecting of buildings for his work at the three places which were to remain his centres for the rest of his career. One other

feature was to come, namely, the annual Conference of his preachers.

To the first such Conference he invited those clergy of the Church of England who had helped him in his work and also his leading lay preachers. When they met, in June 1744, at the Foundery, there were four ordained clergymen, in addition to the two Wesleys, and four lay preachers (out of a total of about fifty). Thus the majority of Wesley's first Conference consisted of Church-of-England clergy. They were concerned not with the organization of a separate religious body but with how best to continue the work of religious revival already begun. Among the subjects discussed was that of the lay preachers. It is now easy to see that Wesley had no idea of the highly important part that these men would play in his work, both during his lifetime and afterwards. Though he appreciated their value, he seems to have regarded them as only temporary helpers until the regular clergy were won to take their proper place as leaders of the religious movement. The facts turned out very differently from what Wesley imagined in 1744. Lay preachers were to become a characteristic part of the Methodist movement so that to-day, more than two centuries after Wesley's first Conference, of every ten services in Methodist chapels, no less than seven are conducted by lay preachers.

This first Conference of the Wesleys and their helpers marks the end of what may be regarded as the first stage of their work. The foundations had been laid, and the scaffolding was already showing the main lines of the permanent building. We have now to follow its later growth.

CHAPTER VI

CHARLES WESLEY: THE SWEET SINGER

IT is fitting that our first chapter dealing with the later development of John Wesley's work should be devoted to his younger brother, Charles. Though it is, of course, true that the work could never have existed at all without John, it is also true that it could never have held sway over masses of people, or had the character it had (and has) but for the contribution of Charles. The Preface to the Methodist Hymn-book now in use begins with the words: 'Methodism was born in song.' That song was mainly Charles Wesley's.

We have seen already that as a child and youth Charles had a gay, infectious spirit. It was natural to him to express his thoughts and feelings in lilting verse. When therefore, his religious experience was deeply moved, it was equally natural that he should break into song.

Though it is true that Charles had a less commanding character than John's, it is unjust to think of him as a feeble shadow of his brother. Charles had a character all his own, though this did not have much chance to show itself in his early years. Until his return from Georgia, he had always been under the strong influence of someone else. He was a sickly child and so was even more dependent upon his mother than he might otherwise have been. When barely nine years old, he left home for Westminster School. There, as was natural, he looked up to his big brother Samuel who was seventeen years older than

Charles, was an usher at the School, and had made himself responsible for the small boy's fees. Indeed, for the next ten years Samuel was as a father to Charles who does not seem ever to have visited his home during the whole period.

By the time that Charles went to Christ Church, Oxford, in 1726, John had become a Fellow of Lincoln and so, in some measure, took Samuel's place as the young man's example and guide. In some respects, Charles thought of John as his leader for the rest of his life. Yet, in other respects, he went his own way. We have seen already that it was Charles who, during John's stay at Epworth and Wroote, in 1727-9, began the Holy Club, though he at once stepped aside for John when the latter returned to Oxford. Again, Charles went to Georgia with John, but he returned to England alone some months before John did. More important still, Charles' religious change came before John's, and when John heard of it he called it 'surprising news'. It is clear that however highly Charles thought of his brother, he was not altogether under his influence.

Another feature of Charles' character needs to be remembered also. Charles had a strong artistic strain, as was shown by his poetry and by the musical genius which came out in his sons. But he also had a toughness which one does not always think of in connection with such a temperament. While a small boy at Westminster School he won a reputation for fisticuffs. And one of the first things he did after his religious conversion was to visit the poor wretches in the condemned cells at Newgate prison and to go with them to the place of execution. It must have been terrible work and have needed uncommon courage. Only a passionate sympathy could have inspired



anyone to carry it through. Thus, in July 1738, Charles wrote in his *Journal*:

I preached at Newgate to the condemned felons, and visited one of them in his cell, sick of a fever; a poor black that had robbed his master. I told him of one who came down from heaven to save lost sinners, and him in particular. . . . He listened with all the signs of eager astonishment; the tears trickled down his cheeks while he cried: 'What! was it for me?'

During the night before the execution, Charles and a friend had themselves locked in a cell with all the condemned men. The next day they went with them to Tyburn, and Charles continues:

The Black had spied me coming out of the coach, and saluted me with his looks. As often as his eyes met mine

he smiled with the most composed, delightful countenance I ever saw. . . . None showed any natural terror of death: no fear, or crying, or tears. . . . We sang several hymns. . . . Exactly at twelve they were turned off. I spoke a few suitable words to the crowd; and returned, full of peace and confidence in our friend's happiness.

Evidently Charles was as concerned with putting his religion into practice as he was with preaching it. We shall see that this was true of both the brothers all through their lives.

But the one way above all others in which Charles expressed his religion was in his hymns. Every Protestant hymn-book in use in England has been enriched by some of them. 'Hark! the herald angels sing', 'Christ the Lord is risen to-day. Hallelujah!' 'Jesu, Lover of my soul', 'Soldiers of Christ arise', and 'Gentle Jesus, meek and mild' are all well-known even to people who do not often sing hymns and they were all written by Charles Wesley. From the day of his conversion, when he wrote 'Where shall my wondering soul begin?', almost to the day of his death, shortly before which he wrote 'In age and feebleness extreme', a constant stream of hymns poured from him. Some were suggested by a passing event, others by a thought which suddenly came to him in conversation or in reading. A hymn was Charles' natural way of expressing a religious idea. Altogether he wrote the amazing number of nearly seven thousand. As the writing of them was spread over fifty years, it is easy to calculate the average rate of his output. With such a large number, it was natural that their quality should vary considerably. Some of them, it must be confessed, were little better than

doggerel, but the vast majority were of high quality and lasting worth, and at least some were religious poetry as noble as any to be found in the English language. Several hundreds are still in use in various hymn-books.

His achievement was all the more remarkable because until his time hymn-singing had formed little part in public worship. Psalms, either as in the English Prayer-book or altered to fit some set metre ('The Lord's my Shepherd, I'll not want' is now a well-known example) were chanted or sung in some places of worship. But it was only shortly before the Wesleys that Dr. Watts had begun to compose hymns, as we understand the term. Many of Watts' hymns, too, were based on a psalm or some other piece of Bible-poetry. Charles Wesley struck out on a new line, or at least he added his own touch of genius and so produced a quality of English hymn-writing which has never been surpassed either before or since his own day.

His hymns had a still greater importance than this. They provided one of the chief sources of inspiration for the preaching work of the two Wesley brothers; and this is what chiefly concerns us here. The hymns provided for the crowds, who thronged to hear the preaching, what in a modern infant-school might be called 'expression-work'. Instead of just listening, the crowds could express their feelings as they sang one or other of Charles Wesley's mighty hymns which put into words the crowds' feeling because Charles Wesley had first felt it himself.

But in his hymns Charles expressed more than merely passing feelings. He put into poetic form the beliefs on which his brother and he placed most stress as being necessary for a full Christian life. So the mass of their followers learned their beliefs as they sang.

John and Charles were so different, the one from the other, in certain points of character that we need not be surprised if from time to time they held different opinions about some matters connected with their work. We have seen already how John's forceful mind and will refused to be thwarted in his main purpose. Thus, when he could not find churches to preach in, he preached outside them; and when the ordained clergy refused to help him, he made use of laymen though only a few months earlier he could never have imagined himself doing either of these things, or others similarly. Charles was less easily adaptable just because he was less determined on the main purpose; and as time went on he tended to withdraw from some of John's work, though they remained firm friends throughout their joint lives.

Also, in 1749 Charles married and shortly afterwards settled in Bristol. Though for several years he travelled about a good deal, much as John did, Bristol was his home, and he was always glad to be back there. His home-life was very happy, and after about 1756 he gave up almost entirely the life of a travelling preacher and devoted his time to the Methodist societies in and around Bristol.

In 1771 Charles and his family moved to London. One of the main reasons for the change was that Charles had two sons, Charles and Samuel, with high musical gifts. They both played the harpsichord so well, especially the works of Bach and Handel (both of whom had only recently died), that they gave concerts in Charles' London house. Also they were both organists. Samuel, the younger of these two boys, had a still more famous son named Samuel Sebastian, his second name being a sign of Samuel's admiration for the great Johann Sebastian Bach.

S. S. Wesley was the most famous organist and composer of church music of his day. He became a chorister of the Chapel Royal, London, and cathedral organist, at various times, of Hereford, Exeter, Winchester and Gloucester, as well as holding several other musical posts. So Charles Wesley's artistic gift was handed down to his sons and grandson, though whereas his gift expressed itself in poetry, theirs was in the allied realm of music.

In such a book as this, which is a biography of John Wesley, it is not possible to do full justice to his brother Charles. But perhaps enough has been said to show that John's work would have been impossible without the work of Charles.

Charles lived to be eighty-one years of age, dying in 1788. By that time John was eighty-five and had only three more years to live. For John, Charles' death was a break from the past which could never be quite healed because no-one then living had shared so much of it with him.

CHAPTER VII

TRAVELS AND PERILS

WE have now to pick up again the main thread of John Wesley's work after the first Conference of his preachers in 1744. One of the most striking parts of the Wesleys' experiences during the twelve to fifteen years following that date was the violent opposition which they met as they journeyed over the country. During the first two or three years after their conversion in May 1738, their preaching caused little worse than curiosity except among the clergy who almost everywhere kept them out of the church pulpits. The first idea seems to have been that the field-preaching was ill-mannered but was not likely to do more than attract a few of the common people who would soon grow tired of it, especially when they saw their 'betters' frowning upon it.

Those who held these ideas had not measured the force of character of John Wesley or of the spirit which filled him and his followers. When, gradually, it became clear that here was no mere passing whim but a great and growing movement that had come to stay, then its enemies, becoming angry, began to organize violent opposition. Too often the mobs were incited by those who ought to have known better—in the towns by magistrates and in the countryside by the squire and the parson.

How the two brothers safely survived the brutal treatment that they received over and over again is amazing almost beyond belief. They were not big, brawny fellows

like the mob-leaders who came against them. John was only five feet six inches tall and weighed less than nine stones. He was quiet in manner and gave the impression of being delicate in health. He wore black clothes without any ornament either at the knee-fastenings of his breeches or as buckles on his shoes. Unlike most men in the eighteenth century, he did not wear a wig, but his own hair was allowed to fall down naturally to near his shoulders, curling gently at the ends. But despite this quiet and trim appearance there was a wiry body and an iron will which nothing could daunt. He believed that he had been called to do a particular work and he did not intend that anything should turn him from doing it.

He regularly rose at four o'clock in the morning, prepared himself for the day by spending an hour at his devotions, and then preached at five. What is not less remarkable is that there was always a congregation to hear him. After that he usually set out on the day's journey. This was planned ahead so that those who wished to hear him would know when and where they could do so, and nothing was allowed to interfere with this arranged time-table. In summer and winter, through fine weather and foul, he travelled on relays of horses, preaching several times before nightfall.

It must be remembered that he had no well-made roads to ride along. Through the whole length and breadth of England there did not exist anything that we in the twentieth century would recognize as a road. At best they were grass tracks or country lanes. In the winter these were rutty quagmires where a coach would be embedded and where a horseman went at the peril of his neck.

In John Wesley's case the danger was increased by his habit of reading as he rode. Against all the rules of good

horsemanship, he would throw the reins on the neck of his horse, take a book from his saddle-bag and become absorbed in its contents. These books were not 'light reading' but serious works on religion or history or the like. If a list is made of the books mentioned in his *Journal* as having been read in this way, they add up to a large library. We can see this if we dip into his *Journal* at almost any point. Thus, on 27-28th May 1742, as he rode from Birstall, near Leeds, to Newcastle-on-Tyne, he noted: 'I read, with great expectation, yesterday and to-day, Xenophon's *Memorable Things of Socrates*'. On Monday 31st, as he rode south again from Newcastle: 'I read over to-day the famous Dr. Pitcairn's works.' On 4th June between Birstall and Beeston: 'The book I now opened was [Jacob Behmen's] *Mysterium Magnum*, or Exposition of Genesis . . . it is most sublime nonsense; inimitable bombast; fustian not to be paralleled.' On 5th June, on his way towards Epworth: 'I made an end of Madam Guyon's *Short Method of Prayer* and *Les Torrents Spirituelles*'. So it goes on all through the *Journal*. Small wonder that time and again he was thrown over his horse's head as the uncontrolled beast stumbled into a pothole or against a stone. But John seems never to have been hurt too seriously to prevent his mounting and opening his book again at the place where his reading had been interrupted.

In spite of all handicaps, he averaged eight thousand miles and a thousand services a year for the greater part of fifty years. Nor were his travels limited to the English countryside. He went into Scotland and Wales; and twenty-one times he crossed to Ireland and back, usually in alternate years.

It is perhaps less surprising, when one knows all this, that such a man refused to be turned from his purpose by

misguided mobs. To him a mob was only an incident in the day's programme. John Wesley met it in the calm confidence that God, who had sent him on the journey, would show him how best to complete it. In the midst of insult and peril to life and limb, he remained quiet and unruffled, never showing either fear or anger. He wrote: 'It was my rule, confirmed by long experience, always to look a mob in the face.'

The first opposition he met was little more than horse-play such as might have come from ignorant and mischievous youngsters—a few clods of earth were thrown, then sticks, and occasionally stones. But gradually the attacks became more serious. One of the earliest instances of a change in the temper of the opposition took place in the village of Pensford near Bristol, in March 1742. John Wesley was preaching in 'a little green spot, near the town' when

a great company of rabble, hired (as we afterwards found) for that purpose, came furiously upon us, bringing a bull, which they had been baiting, and now strove to drive in among the people. But the beast was wiser than his drivers; and continually ran either on one side of us, or the other, while we quietly sang praise to God. . . . The poor wretches . . . at length seized upon the bull, now weak and tired, . . . and by main strength, partly dragged, and partly thrust him in among the people. . . . I once or twice put aside his head with my hand, that the blood might not drop upon my clothes. . . . But the table falling down, some of our friends caught me in their arms, and carried me right away on their shoulders. . . . We went a little way off, where I finished my discourse.

This is a fair sample not only of the sort of treatment that the mobs began to offer but also of the unruffled calm with which Wesley faced it.

In October 1743 there were wild and dangerous scenes in Staffordshire. They began at Wednesbury where a mob surrounded the house where Wesley was staying and shouted: 'Bring out the Minister; we will have the Minister.' After a time Wesley decided 'to look the mob in the face'. His own graphic record is:

I bade them make way, that I might go among the people. As soon as I was in the midst of them, I called for a chair, and standing up, asked, 'What do any of you want with me?' Some said 'We want you to go with us to the Justice.' I replied, 'That I will, with all my heart.' I then spoke a few words, which God applied; so they cried out with might and main, 'The gentleman is an honest gentleman, and we will spill our blood in his defence.' I asked, 'Shall we go to the Justice to-night, or in the morning?' Most of them cried, 'To-night, to-night', on which I went before and two or three hundred followed.

On reaching the Justice's house, however 'they were brought to a full stop, the Justice being in bed and ordering them, through his son, to go home'. They therefore decided to go to another Justice at Walsall, but he also was in bed—though it was only seven o'clock at night! By this time the temper of the mob was cooling. They decided to go home, and about fifty of them escorted Wesley. Hardly had they started when a mob appeared from Walsall 'pouring like a flood' and soon there was a free fight between the two mobs until the Wednesbury men were scattered, leaving Wesley at the mercy of the



victors. (It should be remembered that all this happened in the dark, there being no street-lamps, and the rain was pouring down.) Wesley relates that

the noise on every side was like the roaring of the sea. They dragged me along till we came to the town; where, seeing the door of a large house open, I attempted to go in; but a man, catching me by the hair, pulled me back into the middle of the mob.

After being dragged from one end of the town to the other, and having tried to little purpose to address the mob, he says:

I broke out aloud into prayer. And now the man who just before had headed the mob, turned, and said, 'Sir, I will spend my life for you: follow me, and not one soul here shall touch a hair of your head.'

It was this man who, with three or four others, avoiding a bridge held by the mob, took Wesley

on one side, over the mill-dam, and thence through the meadows; till a little before ten, God brought me safe to Wednesbury; having lost only one flap of my waist-coat, and a little skin from one of my hands.

In the course of some later comments on the experience, he wrote:

From the beginning to the end I found the same presence of mind as if I had been sitting in my own study.

And that one man

came rushing through the press, and raising his arm to strike, on a sudden let it drop, and only stroked my head, saying, 'What soft hair he has!'

Whatever the explanation, John Wesley unmistakably had an influence over a crowd—whether it had gathered to hear him or to take his life—that was beyond the power of ordinary men to wield, or to resist.

From time to time, strange reports were spread about the Wesleys, which was easy at a period when the mass of people were unable to read, and so news was likely to be little better than rumour. Some people believed them to be Roman Catholics in disguise; and in 1745, the year of Bonnie Prince Charlie's rebellion, they were commonly reputed to be Jacobites. This seems to have been the root cause of the wild scenes in Cornwall in July of that year.

At Falmouth, Wesley went 'to see a gentlewoman who had been long indisposed. Almost as soon as I was set down, the house was beset on all sides by an innumerable multitude of people.' They forced the outer door of the house, and even Wesley wrote that his life did not then seem 'worth an hour's purchase'. The crowd included the crews of some privateers, and it was they who brought matters to a head.

Coming up all together, they set their shoulders to the inner door, and cried out, 'Avast lads, avast!' Away went all the hinges at once, and the door fell back into the room. I stepped forward at once into the midst of them, and said, 'Here I am. Which of you has anything to say to me? To which of you have I done any wrong? To you? Or you? Or you?' I continued speaking till I came, bare-headed as I was . . . into the middle of the street, and then raising my voice, said, 'Neighbours, countrymen! Do you desire to hear me speak?' They cried vehemently, 'Yes, yes. He sh^d all speak, he shall. Nobody shall hinder him.'

So the little clergyman spoke to the mob until 'one or two of their captains swore, not a man should touch him'. This riot differed from the Staffordshire one, and from most others, in that a clergyman and some other gentlemen spoke up in Wesley's favour and at last sent him safely away by sea.

Thanks to Wesley's cool courage, which always enabled him to look his opponents in the face, such rowdiness as this did not hinder his work. Perhaps the advertisement which it gave, really helped the work. Wherever he went, men and women, young and old, were influenced for good. Not a few of them, turned from lives little better than those of beasts to lives both respectable and useful to their fellows.

The one class of people whom, as a class, Wesley was never able to influence was that which he referred to as 'so-called gentlemen'. The division between class and class was much sharper in the eighteenth century than it is in the twentieth, and those who liked to think themselves gentry looked down not only on poor people but on anyone engaged in trade of any sort, no matter how rich his trade might have made him. Also, the gentry, as a class, were closely connected with the Established Church. In the small towns and villages especially, squire and parson hunted together, and the parson was usually under the squire's control. So, because the Wesleys were thought to be a disgrace to the Church, and to be against the Church, and because their work was chiefly with the poor and outcast, the gentle-folk and the 'so-called gentlemen' would have nothing to do with them except, often, to bribe a mob to wreck their meetings.

To this general rule there were a few, but only a few, exceptions. One of the exceptions was the Countess of

Huntingdon who had been one of the members of the Fetter Lane society from which Wesley had separated in 1740. Very possibly she was one of the eighteen or nineteen who left when he did. Later she became a supporter of George Whitefield who differed from Wesley on certain points of belief. The Countess was a wealthy lady, and she used her wealth to build and maintain a number of chapels mostly in such fashionable places as Bath and Brighton. Her main idea was to bring religion to well-bred ladies and gentlemen. Her success was limited mainly because such people refused to have dealings with those whom they considered ill-bred. When, for example, the Countess invited the Duchess of Buckingham to come to hear Whitefield preach, the Duchess replied in the following terms:

I thank your ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers: their doctrines are most repulsive, strongly tinged with Impertinence and Disrespect towards their Superiors, in perpetually endeavouring to level all Ranks, and do away with all Distinctions. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the Common Wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting; and I cannot but wonder that Your Ladyship should relish any sentiment so much at variance with High Rank and Good Breeding.

It is not surprising that Wesley felt cramped and stifled among such people, not because he did not know how to behave among them—he was always a perfect little gentleman, no matter whether his company was rich or poor—but because he felt that such people put up a barrier to the message which he had to deliver. Though

he and Lady Huntingdon remained friends, and sometimes he preached in her chapels, he knew that his way was elsewhere.

In spite of the opposition of lawless mobs, and of the refusal of 'so-called gentlemen' to hear him, Wesley's message continued to win its way among the masses of ordinary folk. Many of these suffered in all sorts of ways because they were associated with him. A fair sample of such men was John Nelson.

Nelson was a Yorkshire stone-mason whose work took him to London. The first time that Wesley preached at Moorfields, Nelson joined the crowd waiting for the preacher. The effect was, for him, never to be forgotten. Nelson's own record of it is that

as soon as he got upon the stand, he stroked back his hair, and turned his face towards where I stood, and I thought fixed his eyes upon me. His countenance struck such an awful dread upon me, before I heard him speak, that it made my heart beat like the pendulum of a clock; and, when he did speak, I thought his whole discourse was aimed at me.

Later, Nelson heard Wesley preach at Kennington Common, with a similar result:

When he begun to speak, his words made me tremble. I thought he spoke to no-one but me, and I durst not look up; for I imagined all the people were looking at me.

'I thought he fixed his eyes upon me.' 'I thought he spoke to no-one but me.' How many others in the vast crowds felt the same as John Nelson? This effect that Wesley had,

that he was preaching not to a crowd but to each individual in the crowd, largely explains his power.

Its effect upon Nelson was not only striking but permanent. In due course he returned to his home town of Birstall where he became one of Wesley's leaders, and, as usual, was a marked man by Wesley's opponents there, of whom Wesley wrote: 'the most active was Mr. Coley, Vicar of Birstal'. In May 1744 Nelson was arrested and pressed into the army, as were other Methodists. Nelson presented the army with an unusual problem, for he refused to be a soldier. In the twentieth century he would be called a conscientious objector, and probably would be allowed to render some other form of service to the State. But in the eighteenth century such a man was a novelty. There was no known way of dealing with him, if he refused orders, except various forms of military punishment. But Nelson was quite unmoved. He stated his position simply and plainly: 'I shall not fight; for I cannot . . . pray for a man, and get up and kill him when I have done.' Though he was forcibly dressed in soldier's clothes, and had a weapon thrust into his hand, he refused to do anything as a soldier on his own account. The only things he willingly did were to reprove the officers for swearing, and to preach at every opportunity. Neither imprisonment nor any other punishment could prevent him from doing either the one or the other.

How the business would have ended there is no knowing had not someone else taken a part. The someone else was the Countess of Huntingdon who used her influence with the army chiefs to obtain Nelson's discharge. In spite of the nuisance he had been to his officers, the Major who was dealing with him said: 'I wish I had a regiment of such men as he is in all respects, save that one, his refusal

to fight; I would not care what enemy I had to meet.'

After his discharge, Nelson continued for thirty years to be one of Wesley's most loyal and valued helpers and preachers in the north of England. No persecution could shake him. Throughout his life he remained a natural, blunt-spoken Yorkshireman, and doubtless this was one reason for his influence with his fellows. He died in July 1774. He was only one of many individuals who were similarly influenced by Wesley's preaching.

Of course, not all of Wesley's helpers were preachers as John Nelson was. But one of the marks of Wesley's genius was that his organization made it possible for every person who followed him to find a place in it, and for many of them to find also a responsible bit of work to do. Not a few of them were very ignorant about the Bible and almost everything connected with religious life, and Wesley saw how great was the need to hold them together and to instruct them.

It is unlikely that he had a complete organization in his mind when he started out. Indeed, he would have been much more likely to discourage such an organization because it would have seemed to be a rival to the Church, and this was always the last thing that he wished for. But the needs of his followers had to be met. Naturally he used for his new converts the methods that he had already used in the Holy Club and at Fetter Lane. The grouping together in classes, of those who had been influenced by his preaching, became a regular part of his work. Each class numbered about a dozen, and each was under the care of a leader. The leader met the class once a week to encourage them in their new religious life, to help them in difficulties, and to be able to watch over any who seemed in danger of drifting away. Each leader was responsible for

his class to Wesley or to any assistant preacher whom Wesley might appoint.

This method, which at first was used just where circumstances seemed to lead to it, was found to be so simple and practical that, as time passed, it was adopted all over the country and among the whole Methodist people. Also it became the custom for each class-member to contribute one penny a week, or more if he was able, through his leader, to the expenses of the society, and so there was a steady income without any particular member being over-burdened.

In spite of the perils which the Wesleys and their converts had to face during the early years of their campaigning, their labours went on. After a few years there were very few districts in the country where one or both of the brothers had not been or where Methodist societies were not to be found.

We have now to see some of the practical results of Wesley's work, especially during its later stages.

CHAPTER VIII

GOOD WORKS

WE have seen that even in the very early days of the Holy Club, and immediately after their conversion, both the brothers had realized that Christian people had duties to their fellows: so they had visited prisoners and cared for children. All through their lives this sort of work went on and grew.

One class of people for whom Wesley had a deep pity were the sick poor. There was then almost no provision for the care of such people, and their earnings when in work were often so small that when they became ill they could not afford to pay for doctors and medicine. In 1746 Wesley opened a free dispensary—the first in London—where medicine was provided. What was even more remarkable was that he made electrical treatment available when it was needed. Wesley, of course, did not invent this treatment: he had read about it in the writings of the American, Benjamin Franklin. But his use of it shows how keenly he was alive to new ideas of all kinds.

As a further help to poor people in curing common ailments, Wesley wrote a book entitled *Primitive Physic*. Some of its prescriptions seem to us weird and wonderful. Thus, for hoarseness he recommended garlic and lard beaten together and rubbed into the soles of the feet. He had at least the merit of taking his own medicine, for several times in his *Journal* he mentions using this 'cure'. On Thursday 14th October 1780 he noted:

I could scarce speak at all. At night I used my never-failing remedy, bruised garlic applied to the soles of the feet. This cured my hoarseness in six hours: in one hour it cured my lumbago, the pain in the small of my back, which I had ever since I came from Cornwall.

Primitive Physic was only one example of the writing that Wesley did and which became a more and more important part of his work as time went on. Many even of his lay preachers, as well as of his rank-and-file, had had few if any opportunities of education. The Wesleys, on the other hand, being themselves cultured scholars, realized the need for religious convictions to be well informed. They believed that no religious man would be content to be ignorant: he needed to have a trained mind if only to read the Bible intelligently. As early as 1749 John Wesley began to publish the *Christian Library* which was to consist of quotations from, or summaries of, standard religious books. Altogether, during the next few years, some fifty volumes were included in the *Library*. That they served a useful purpose was shown by the fact that they continued to be printed and that a new edition of them appeared as late as during 1819-26.

In 1753 Wesley published an English Dictionary 'Explaining most of those Hard Words which are found in the Best English Writers. By a Lover of Good English and Common Sense'.

During that winter and the spring of 1754 Wesley suffered one of his rare spells of serious illness. Indeed, he was so sure of his approaching death from consumption that he wrote an epitaph which was to be carved on his tombstone (though in fact he had nearly forty more years to live!). During his convalescence he began to write his

Notes on the New Testament, mainly for his preachers. Though its general point of view about the Scriptures is no longer widely held, many of his comments showed an insight which later scholars would fully support.

These were but some of Wesley's writings. During many years, in addition to such books as those already mentioned, a stream of pamphlets on all kinds of subjects poured from his pen—sermons, comments on public affairs, short biographies, four hundred or more of them altogether. These had such large sales that, although many of them cost only a penny each, they brought in something like £1,000 a year. In the eighteenth century such an income was wealth. But Wesley refused to make personal profit from it. His maxim for Christian people was: 'Gain all you can; Save all you can; Give all you can.' How genuinely he applied the maxim to himself is shown by his reply to the Commissioners of Excise who in 1776 asked for a list of his household plate:

SIR,

I have two silver spoons at London, and two at Bristol. This is all the plate I have at present; and I shall not buy any more while so many round me want bread.

The fact was that his income was either given away to poor people or used towards the cost of his medical and other work for the poor.

There was one need which had to be met even before the *Christian Library* could be widely useful, namely that his followers should be able to read. So he encouraged night-classes for men and women, and thus he was one of the pioneers of adult schools.

One of his helpers, Hannah Ball of High Wycombe, being greatly concerned about the children around her

who were uncared for and ignorant, began to gather them together and to teach them. At the end of 1770 she wrote to Wesley explaining that she had them on Saturdays and Sundays. 'They are a wild little company, but seem willing to be instructed.' So began a Sunday School ten years before Robert Raikes, who is usually regarded as the pioneer of Sunday Schools, began his work in Gloucester.

Another example of the importance that Wesley gave to education was his work for the school at Kingswood. As early as 1740 George Whitefield had begun a school there but, in the main, the school's growth was due to John Wesley, so much so that he could write 'The School began on Midsummer day, 1748.' Additional buildings were then erected, and a staff of masters and others was appointed. Wesley not only kept the school under his close control but wrote most of the books which the boys were to use. Thus, while he was there for a fortnight in September and October 1750, he noted that he 'selected passages of Milton for the eldest children to transcribe and repeat weekly'. On another day:

I was with the children from four to five in the morning. I spent most of the day in revising Kennet's *Antiquities*, and marking what was worth reading in the school.

On other days he 'revised for the use of the children, Archbishop Potter's *Grecian Antiquities*, a dry, dull, heavy book, [and] Mr. Lewis's *Hebrew Antiquities*'. On 'Thursday I prepared a short *History of England* for the use of the children, and on *Friday* and *Saturday* a short *Roman History*'. On the Monday 'I read over Mr. Holmes's *Latin Grammar* and extracted from it what was needful to perfect our own'.

One need not be surprised if such a man, who could

write, on an average, one school text-book a day, on such a variety of subjects, for several days, had not much understanding of the minds of the poor boys who were to use them!—or that a man who himself always got out of bed at four o'clock should think it perfectly natural to begin to examine the children 'from four to five in the morning'. The truth was that John Wesley's ideas about education were those which he and his brothers and sisters had been used to at Epworth.

At Kingswood, there were other things that twentieth-century children would think 'dry, dull, and heavy'. The school subjects included reading, writing, English, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, arithmetic, geometry, algebra, history, rhetoric, logic, physics and music. The school rules laid it down that, having risen at four o'clock, and had an hour for their private prayers, the boys should go to service at five and breakfast at six. At seven o'clock they began a four-hour stretch of work in school. This allowed an hour's work in the garden before midday dinner. At one o'clock they began another four-hour spell in class. Another hour's private devotions was then followed by yet another hour in the garden or walking. For supper they had bread with either butter or milk, and at eight o'clock they went to bed. And Wesley insisted that 'the rules will not be broken in favour of any person whatsoever'.

What possibly strikes us most forcibly is that no provision was made for games or holidays. It was no part of Wesley's scheme that they should have either. His own dictum was: 'He who plays when he is a child will play when he is a man.' It is a little difficult to know which to pity more—the boys who were thus crammed and drilled or the masters who had to cram and drill them. But, if we think that Wesley had no understanding of children, we



must remember also that his ideas were widely accepted in his own day, and much later, and that evidently there were plenty of parents who, knowing the rules, thought that Kingswood was a good school to which to send their sons.

Something, at least, of what would be Wesley's surprise, were he to return to his school to-day, can be imagined. For Kingswood, with 450 boys, has grown into one of the outstanding public schools of the country with a high reputation for both scholarship and sport.

All Wesley's activities, seemingly endless in their variety and vast in their quantity, would have been impossible to any ordinary man. Indeed, any one branch of his work—his journeys, preaching, oversight of the societies, writing, education, social—would have kept any ordinary man busy. That he was able to combine them all, and to continue with them for half a century, was due partly to his

outstanding natural genius and partly to the way in which he organized his time. While, as we have seen, he read what amounted to a large library of books during his journeys on horseback, he wrote his tracts in odd intervals between his journeys and services, intervals which a less earnest man would have spent in rest or recreation. Wesley's day began at four in the morning and ended at about ten at night. During those eighteen hours not a moment was wasted. Nor was anything or anyone ever allowed to prevent him from carrying out his appointed work.

This was certainly one of the reasons why for many years he did not marry. We have seen already that some of John Wesley's experiences with ladies were not happy, particularly while he was in Georgia. It seems as though these experiences made him hesitate a long time before he allowed himself to become too friendly with anyone else. In the year 1748, however, he seemed on the point of marrying a widow-lady, Grace Murray, who for a long while had been most a useful helper in some of his societies. Some of his fellow-workers—especially his brother Charles and Whitefield—did not think her a suitable wife for John, and they interfered in such a way as to make the marriage almost impossible. Charles' reasons for this interference have never been made quite clear, and it may well be that he lived to repent of his action, for, no matter how unsuitable Grace Murray might have been in certain ways, she was a thorough Christian lady in comparison with the woman that John married shortly afterwards.

The lady in question was a Mrs. Molly Vazcille, widow of a London merchant. Wesley's reasons for selecting her as his wife remain a complete mystery. We do know that he met her through a family of friends for whom he had deep respect and affection, and this may have made him

think more favourably of her than she deserved. Whatever may have been his opinions about her previously, his decision to marry her seems to have been made while he was at her London house to which he had been taken after injuring a foot through slipping on a frozen road in February 1751. Almost all that we know for certain about the event is the rather strange note in his *Journal* under the date 2nd February 1751:

I was clearly convinced that I ought to marry. For many years I remained single because I believed that I could be more useful in a single, than in a married state. . . . I now as fully believed, that in my present circumstances, I might be more useful in a married state; into which, upon this clear conviction, and by the advice of my friends, I entered a few days later.

Neither the date nor the place of the wedding is known with certainty, nor do we know of anyone present at the ceremony.

Almost from the first, things began to go wrong, for two chief reasons. First, though Wesley seems to have made clear that he could never consent to travel a mile less or to preach a sermon less as a married man than if he remained single, Mrs. Wesley found that travelling with him was altogether beyond her endurance. Not many vigorous men could have travelled several thousand miles a year, as John Wesley did; and certainly no woman could be expected to do so. Soon, therefore, Mrs. Wesley had to stay behind, and she felt herself neglected. This led to the second cause of trouble: she turned out to be a bitterly jealous woman who spent her time at home imagining all kinds of evil things about her absent husband. When he returned from his journeys, she was apt to be quarrelsome

and even perhaps violent. More than once she left him, but later returned, until under the date 23rd January 1771 he recorded in his *Journal*:

For what cause I know not to this day, — set out for Newcastle, purposing 'never to return'. *Non eam reliqui: non dimissi: non revocabo.* ('I did not desert her: I did not send her away: I will not recall her.')

John Wesley must have counted himself fortunate that at last the misery of twenty years was brought to an end, though he could not escape the responsibility of having chosen the lady in the first instance. Mrs. Wesley died in October 1781.

It is sad to remember that through all the eighty years, from the time when he left Epworth as a child until his death, Wesley never knew the comfort of a settled home to which he could return at the end of a wearisome journey. Yet there is no sign that he felt any pity for himself. His *Journal* shows that he went on his appointed way, travelling and preaching and writing, all through the years without allowing personal plans or disappointments to move him.

CHAPTER IX

THE END OF A LONG JOURNEY

THE period between John Wesley's conversion in May 1738 and his death in March 1791 covered nearly two generations. The first half of that period—until about 1763—was, as we have seen, a time of experiment, of bitter opposition, and yet, notwithstanding everything, of amazing progress for the religious movement which he and his brother had begun. During the second half of the period, the work gradually took on a new character. This was not because Wesley's views had changed or because his efforts grew slack. But when the pioneering days were over, and the societies had been established, possibilities of different kinds of work began to open up. Also, though opposition, both from mobs and from clergy, still had sometimes to be faced, this grew less and less as time went on. The novelty of field-preaching, which mainly had attracted the mobs' attention, began to wear off. Many of the clergy, for their part, were realizing that the Church had lost masses of the people who might have been brought inside if at first the Wesleys had been helped instead of cold-shouldered. If Wesley's work during the latter part of his life seems less exciting than during the first part, it was not less important either to his followers or to the nation as a whole.

During this latter part, the responsibility for the work and the care of the societies, fell upon the shoulders of John Wesley himself. Charles' removal to Bristol, and afterwards to London, meant that John undertook almost

continual journeys through the length and breadth of the British Isles. This unceasing activity left him with little leisure for ordinary social enjoyments. To pass an idle evening with a friend was not thought of. After a conversation with Dr. Johnson, the great Doctor remarked: 'John Wesley's conversation is good, but he is never at leisure, he is always obliged to go at a certain hour. This is very disagreeable to a man who loves to cross his legs and have his talk out, as I do.'

In spite of this, in the course of his travels Wesley met a number of people whose friendship he greatly valued. There was, for example, Ebenezer Blackwell whom he knew when a young man as a member of the Fetter Lane society and later at the Foundery: he was a banker who contributed liberally to some of Wesley's schemes to help the poor. His house at Lewisham was always open to Wesley who there often found such rest and quiet as he would allow himself.

Wesley's early preachers included a number of remarkable men who, however much they had lacked in early education, had triumphed over their limitations, and Wesley honoured them for their faithfulness. An excellent and outstanding example was Thomas Walsh. Walsh was the son of an Irish Roman Catholic carpenter and was born near Limerick. Erse was his native language, but he had the advantage as a boy of being taught some English and Latin, and in due course he set up a school of his own. After having become a Protestant, he came under the influence of some Methodists with whom he threw in his lot and soon became one of Wesley's 'helpers'. His ability to preach in Irish was invaluable, and he was Wesley's companion on the early visits to Ireland. Wesley tells us something about Walsh's native ability, and the way in

which he had studied to equip himself as a leader. He wrote:

I knew a young man who was so thoroughly acquainted with the Bible, that if he was questioned concerning any Hebrew word in the Old, or any Greek word in the New Testament, he would tell, after a little pause, not only how often the one or the other occurred in the Bible, but also what it meant in every place. His name was Thomas Walsh. Such a master of biblic knowledge I never saw before, and never expect to see again.

Of all Wesley's early preachers none was more brilliant or successful. Yet Thomas Walsh was only twenty-eight years old when in 1758 he died of consumption.

Perhaps the man whose support Wesley valued most of all was Rev. John Fletcher. He had been born in Switzerland, and had had a varied career as a soldier in various parts of Europe before circumstances brought him to England where he remained for the rest of his life. While studying English, in 1752, he met Wesley who encouraged him to become a clergyman in the English Church. In 1760 Fletcher became vicar in the village of Madeley in Shropshire. This did not prevent him from continuing to support Wesley. Not only in Madeley but in the neighbouring villages he preached much as Wesley himself might have done. Such was the affection that his parishioners felt for him that Madeley Church was unable to hold the congregations. When Wesley visited Madeley in July 1764 he noted that 'it was a great comfort to me to converse once more with a Methodist of the old stamp'. So high an opinion had Wesley of his friend that Fletcher was marked to become the leader of the Methodist societies after the

death of the two Wesley brothers. But this was not to be. Like Thomas Walsh, Fletcher became consumptive. Though he lingered on for several years, nothing could save him and he died in 1785, at fifty-six years of age when Wesley had still six more years to live. One of the sad aspects of Wesley's career was that, because of the great age to which he lived, he saw nearly all his early friends and companions, including his younger brother Charles, die one by one until he himself seemed to be left alone.

During the second thirty years of Wesley's career, his work not only became more firmly established but also widened in extent. In Ireland it prospered greatly, owing partly to Wesley's frequent visits and partly to his able helpers, notably Thomas Walsh. In Scotland, though some good was done, most of the people were already too closely connected with their own Presbyterian faith, either actually or in theory, to feel much need for other ways of religious thought: Wesley said about them that 'they knew everything and so learnt nothing'! In Wales, Wesley found more response in the south than in the north. The Welsh character seemed more drawn towards the sterner teachings of Calvinism, as explained by George Whitefield, than towards those of Wesley: so most of the Methodist chapels in Wales were 'Calvinistic Methodist'.

The most remarkable spread of Wesley's work, outside England, was in an area that he himself never visited after his conversion—in the United States of America.

As early as 1739 Wesley had had some notion that his work would know no geographical boundaries. James Hervey, one of the members of the Holy Club at Oxford, had written to protest against Wesley's preaching 'in other men's parishes'. Wesley's reply included his claim 'I look upon all the world as my parish'—a claim which

afterwards was aptly inscribed on the plaque in Westminster Abbey to the memory of the two Wesley brothers. When he made the claim, he can have had no idea of how literally it would be fulfilled, or that within a few years of his death there would be Methodists in every quarter of the globe. But, well within his lifetime, he saw the first stage of its fulfilment in America.

The circumstances there were peculiar. Methodist work in the colonies had spread naturally because among the emigrants from England, during the middle years of the eighteenth century, there were many Methodists. These people not only felt the need for regular religious services but also saw possibilities of wider religious work if only suitable men could be set aside to do it. In the year 1768, therefore, they wrote to Wesley urging that such men should be sent out. In the following year two of Wesley's preachers, named Richard Boardman and James Pilmoor, volunteered for work in the American colonies and were sent. In the following year, Wesley seriously considered going out himself but did not see how he could then leave the societies in England and Ireland. In 1771 Francis Asbury, then twenty-six years of age, sailed to America: he was to prove the most notable pioneer of them all.

In 1775 the War of American Independence broke out against Britain. This changed the whole situation. First, the war caused such upheaval that regular religious work became impossible, and all the Methodist preachers except Asbury returned to England, so that when the war ended in 1783 the work had almost to be begun afresh. Second, when in 1783 the colonies became independent, the Established Church of England ceased to be 'Established' in America, and many a member of the Church clergy came home. There were thus large areas without any

Protestant preacher or church services. In certain places, preachers were springing up among the colonists, but there was hardly anyone with authority to conduct a service of Holy Communion. So Asbury wrote urgently asking Wesley for guidance.

As always, Wesley was anxious that nothing should be done to lessen the authority of the Established Church, of which he still regarded the Methodists as being members. He first wrote to the Bishop of London urging him to appoint a man to take charge of religious work in America. This the Bishop refused to do, and so the English Church missed an opportunity in America no less than it had already missed in England.

John Wesley, however, was not the man to be thus thwarted. In spite of his anxiety to do nothing against the order of the Church, the religious needs of men and women mattered to him even more. If such needs could not be met within the accepted order of the Church, they must be met outside it. For this purpose Wesley selected two notable men. One was Thomas Coke, an ordained clergyman and a doctor of law, who had done great service to Wesley. The other was an obvious choice—Francis Asbury, who was already in America. These men he appointed to be Joint Superintendents of the work in the United States. Asbury was a layman; so one of Coke's first actions after landing in America was to ordain him and so to give him the position of a clergyman. Presently these men were ordaining others, and thus provision was made to foster Protestant religion in the newly independent nation. These powers of ordination properly belonged only to a bishop, and before long Coke and Asbury were styling themselves bishops. Wesley disliked their doing so; but he had appointed them to a position which was that of

bishops in fact, so that it was not unreasonable that they should take the name as well.

By giving to Dr. Coke the authority to ordain Asbury, and to both Coke and Asbury the authority to ordain others, Wesley had taken yet another step away from his starting-point as an ordinary priest of the English Church. He was breaking the Church's rule and practice that only a bishop could, by ordination, turn a layman into a clergyman.

To Charles Wesley this action caused acute distress. He could see clearly that the result must be a break from the Church and so must make the Methodist societies into a separate organization. For many years Charles had feared that this would happen, and now that, as he believed, it had become unavoidable, he was deeply unhappy. In preaching, he begged his hearers to remain in the Church; and before he died he insisted that he should not be buried in the plot of ground adjoining the Methodist Chapel in City Road, London (where John had intended they should both be buried), because it had not been consecrated by the Church.

John, however, did not shrink from the results of his action. Indeed, during the next few years he ordained twenty-six others of his preachers. Dearly as he loved the Church, and staunchly as he continued to count himself one of its members and priests, he did not intend that rules and regulations should deprive Methodists of the opportunity to receive the sacraments of the Church: if no regular clergyman was available to administer them, or if the regular clergyman refused them to Methodists, then John Wesley would set aside men whom he thought suitable and worthy for the purpose.

In general, both among his own followers and outside



them, even such actions as these provoked less opposition than might have been expected. The fact was that by the 1780s, that is, during the last ten years of his life, Wesley had become a national figure, looked upon with respect and even with affection by all classes of people. Even at those places where forty years earlier he had been mobbed and all but killed, he was warmly welcomed. He preached at Falmouth in August 1789, when he was eighty-six years of age, and noted in his *Journal*:

The last time I was here, above forty years ago, I was taken prisoner by an immense mob, gaping and roaring like lions: but how is the tide turned! High and low now lined the street, from one end of the town to the other, out of stark love and kindness, gaping and staring as if the King were going by.

At this time he was still vigorous in body and mind, and was still covering great distances, though he now consented to make his longest journeys by coach rather than on horseback.

On his eightieth birthday he wrote:

I entered into my eightieth year; but, blessed be God, my time is not yet 'labour and sorrow'. I find no more pain or bodily infirmities than at five-and-twenty. This I still impute, 1. To the power of God, fitting me for what he calls me to. 2. To my still travelling four or five thousand miles a year. 3. To my sleeping, night or day, whenever I want it. 4. To my rising at a set hour. And 5. To my constant preaching, particularly in the morning.

One of the severest blows of his life was Charles's death in 1788. John, although then eighty-five years old, was touring in the north of England when the news reached him. Shortly after hearing it, he arrived at Bolton and there he began to announce one of Charles' hymns:

Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see!
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee.

'I am left alone'—the words choked in his throat, and for the first time in his long life a personal sorrow was shown in public as the old man sat down and sobbed before the congregation. But it was only for a moment. Soon he was on his feet again to join confidently in singing the remainder of the hymn:

I rise superior to my pain,
When I am weak, then am I strong.

It would seem, however, that the loss of Charles, who had shared his first religious experiences and all that came out of them, left its mark upon him. Almost at once, age began to show itself on his faculties. In the next year he had to admit:

I now find I grow old: 1. My sight is decayed; so that I cannot read a small print, unless in strong light. 2. My strength is decayed; so that I walk much slower than I did some years since. 3. My memory of names, whether of persons or places, is decayed; till I stop a little to recollect them.

His entry for New Year's Day 1790 was:

I am now an old man, decayed from head to foot. My eyes are dim; my right hand shakes much; my mouth is hot and dry every morning; I have a lingering fever almost every day; my motion is weak and slow. However, blessed be God, I do not slack my labour: I can preach and write still.

In October of that year he ceased to keep his *Journal*.

But, while he breathed and could move at all, nothing could prevent him from working. During 1790 and on into 1791 he continued to travel. Indeed, he was actually travelling when the last weakness came upon him and compelled him to return to his rooms adjoining the Chapel in City Road.

How vigorous his mind was up to the very end, and how closely he kept in touch with events around him, are shown by a letter which, only a week before his death, he wrote to encourage young William Wilberforce who then was beginning his campaign against negro slavery. This campaign Wesley called a 'glorious enterprise in opposing

that execrable villainy which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. . . . Go on, in the name of God, and in the power of His might, until even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before it.' It was the last letter he ever wrote.

Though his mind remained thus alert, after his return to City Road he was plainly losing his bodily strength. For a few days more he spoke to friends as they gathered in his room, and sometimes he managed to sing a verse or two. On the morning of 2nd March 1791 he opened his eyes to say, quietly, 'Farewell', and a few minutes later he breathed his last.

A twentieth-century historian wrote of John Wesley that: 'His gifts for command stamp him as probably the most striking of eighteenth-century figures, and leave him in the select division of the first class of the great leaders of all ages.'

In thinking of these words we should remember some of the other great Englishmen of that century. Marlborough, Nelson, Clive, Hastings and the two Pitts were among them. Yet more and more this judgement about Wesley's towering greatness is being recognized as sound. Unlike many other great leaders, he worked not for his own glory or even for what commonly has been called the 'glory' of his country but for the salvation of the masses of his fellow-men.

Some measure of his work is given by the fact that when he died almost 140,000 people were members of Methodist societies in various parts of the world, of whom more than 70,000 were in the British Isles and nearly 60,000 in the United States. Even more important than this, his witness had sharply awakened large numbers of religious people

who had no thought of joining his societies, including many in the Established Church itself. Further, the moral tone of the nation as a whole had immensely improved by the opening of the nineteenth century compared with its state of a hundred years before. For that change, too, no single individual was so responsible as John Wesley.